OVERLORD 「8」 The two leaders Kugane Maruyama

illustration by so-bin

オーバーロード 8 二人の指導者

丸山くがね

Side 1 (½) - Enri’s Upheaval and Hectic Days

第1話 エンリの激動かつ慌ただしい日々

Part 1

Enri Emmot rose before the sun came up to make breakfast. There was a lot of food to prepare, and she wasn't as good a cook as her deceased mother.

Counting Nemu, Enri herself and the nineteen goblins loyal to her, she had to make breakfast for twenty-one people. Cooking for two more on top of everyone’s would make twenty-three in total. Preparing that much food was a lot of work, and could be considered a battle in its own right. Enri trembled while looking at the vast quantity of food in front of her and realised that it would all be gone in one meal.

“This is nearly six times as much as before…”

After taking a deep breath, she rolled up her sleeves, psyched herself up and got to work.

She sliced the vegetables up quietly, and then the meat. The process had been engraved into Enri's brain by now.

Although Enri was not especially talented at cooking, the fact that she had learned to cope with such an enormous task in such a short time was a textbook example of how diamonds were made under pressure.

Nemu woke from the sound of Enri making breakfast and rubbed the sleep out of her eyes.

“Morning, onee-chan. Let me help too!”

“Morning, Nemu. I'm good over here, but there's still that thing I asked you to help me take care of yesterday…”

Unhappiness flashed over Nemu's face for a moment, but in the end, she didn't complain, although she did droop her head and replied “‘kay” as she followed Enri's request.

Enri stopped halfway through the cutting.

Her heart ached.

Nemu was ten years old now, and she had been a lively and spirited girl once. After that incident, the formerly naive and carefree Nemu became slavishly obedient to her sister, without any of the playfulness or tantrums of children her age. She was a good girl now — so good that it hurt.

The smiling faces of her parents appeared in Enri's mind. Although several months had passed, the wounds from that incident had not yet healed.

If they had died because of illness, she could have prepared herself for it. If they had died from an accident or a natural disaster, she wouldn't have hated anyone else for it, and maybe she would not have been scarred either. But her parents had been murdered in front of her eyes, and her heart was now filled with resentment. There was no way she could feel otherwise.

Enri squeezed her eyes shut. If there was someone nearby, then she could work hard so they would not see her weakness. But when she was by herself, the loneliness reopened the wounds in her heart.

“—Isn’t that right?”

Even when she opened her eyes, her parents' smiles still floated before her. She replayed the tender moments of the past in her mind.

After the tender memories came the turmoil in her heart. Driven by her hatred for the people who had murdered her parents, Enri slammed with all her might at the hunk of meat with her cleaver and split it in half.

However, since she used too much force, she also chopped a divot out of the block, which made her furrow her brow in frustration.

If the blade gets chipped, it’s going to be hard to fix…… I'm sorry, k-kaa-san.

Enri thought as she apologized for damaging the cleaver that was her only link to her deceased mother.

She gently ran a finger along the edge to make sure it was fine, and at that moment, the door beside her, which led to the living room, opened up.

The person who entered was not human, but someone shorter — one of the demihumans commonly known as goblins.

“Morning, Ane-san. Today's our turn to… what's wrong?”

The goblin paused in the middle of a perfect bow to turn concerned eyes to Enri's hands.

Enri was a mere village girl, but the goblins served her without hesitation because she was their summoner.

After that incident, when the villagers had wondered if they needed to take shifts standing guard, Enri remembered the horn she had been given and used it to summon the goblins.

The villagers were initially surprised and afraid of the goblins since they had suddenly appeared out of nowhere, but they calmed down when Enri told them that she had summoned the goblins with an item from their savior, Ainz Ooal Gown. Needless to say, this was because of the gratitude and trust they felt towards Ainz. Thereafter, the work the goblins had done was enough for the villagers to put aside their suspicions and welcome them from the depths of their hearts.

“Good morning, Kaijali-san, I just used a bit too much force with the cleaver…”

As one of Enri’s summoned goblins, Kaijali, looking like a bear awakened from its winter hibernation, furrowed his eyebrows and put a concerned expression on his face before saying,

“That's no good, you need to take care of that cleaver. The village doesn't have a blacksmith, so we can't repair our equipment either.”

“Is that so…”

“Well, it's alright. We'll think of a solution when the time comes.”

Kaijali spoke in an earnest, yet cheerful voice while he helped make the breakfast. He drew a smoldering wick from the pot he was holding, and with a practiced manoeuvre, lit the stove. The deft ease with which he turned a faint ember into a roaring blaze was evidence of his skill.

But they can't cook… Why is that?

Goblins could not prepare even the simplest meals. Since they ate raw meat and vegetable without a complaint, she thought they might like raw food more, but it became clear that they preferred cooked meals — although they could still stomach raw food without trouble.

Is it because summoned beings don’t know how to cook?

A mere village girl like herself had no answer to this question, and with that she threw herself into her work once more. Fortunately, the cleaver's edge was still intact.

Eventually, breakfast was ready.

There were a wider variety of dishes on the table compared to the days when her mother was cooking.

For example, there was meat. Although the local rangers often shared their kills in the past, the amount they could bring back was nothing compared to now. The reason why they had so much more meat now was because the villagers had expanded their area of activity.

The Great Forest of Tob provided its bounty to them in the form of firewood, wild vegetables and fruits to eat, animals for meat and fur, and even medicinal herbs.

Although the forest was rightfully regarded as a treasure trove, it was also home to wild beasts and monsters, which could make their way back to the village. As a result, the forest was not a place where that the villagers could casually enter. Even the experts like professional hunters were forced to skulk like bandits on the edges of the Wise King of the Forest's territory. However, with the disappearance of the Wise King of the Forest and appearance of the goblin troop, the situation had changed radically.

The greatest change was that the villagers could now easily enter the forest and harvest its resources. The goblins were a key factor in this; meat, which had previously been hard to obtain, could now be easily acquired, and their tables were decked with fresh fruits and vegetables. As a result, the food situation in the village had dramatically improved.

In addition, since the goblins were Enri's subordinates, they delivered the lion's share of their kills to her home.

In addition, one of the newest additions to the village was a ranger who had made contributions to the provisions.

She was a woman who used to be an adventurer in E-Rantel. For various reasons, she moved to this village, and was learning the ways of the hunter from the ranger who was living in the village. As she had been a warrior during her adventuring days, her skills with the bow were excellent, and she could bring down even the biggest game with a few arrows. It was partly because of her efforts that the distribution of meat in the village had improved.

The improved standard of living brought changes, which were reflected in the villagers' bodies.

Enri curled her biceps, flexing her muscles.

Her gains were quite impressive.

Ah, I feel so pumped~ they’re getting even bigger…

The goblins praised Enri at every opportunity with phrases like “Ane-san's totally ripped!” “Yeah, pump it up again!” “She's too swole to control!” “The goal is six-pack!” “Nice cut!”. They most likely meant well, but as a girl, it was difficult to accept such compliments.

If I ended up like how the goblins described, it wouldn't be good…

Enri swept the goblin's idealized, hyper-muscular final form of herself from her mind, and began serving breakfast.

That too was a tedious task. While the goblins wouldn't quibble over a small difference in portion size, the amount of meat in their soup was a huge issue. Enri ensured that everyone's dishes and bowls had a similar amount meat before moving onto the next task.

Sweat was dripping from her forehead by the time breakfast was ready.

“Then, let's call everyone and Nfirea over.”

“Got it~”

“I’ll go! Let me do it! I want to do it!”

As Enri turned around, she saw Nemu standing behind her with eyes alight.

“Have you done your chores?” Her sister nodded by way of reply, and so did Enri. “Really? Then go get Nfi—”

“No! I want to call the goblins!”

Enri had no idea how to answer her little sister's sudden outburst. Kaijali nodded gently to Nemu, presumably indicating that he would entrust her with that task.

“I'll leave that to you, then, I'll go get Nfirea.”

“That's more like it! A capital idea! Ane-san, let me go with you.”

Although this would leave the house empty, Enri wasn't bothered by it. After all, there had never been any issues with thieves breaking in before.

Together with Kaijali, Enri left the house just after Nemu did.

The wind blew in Enri’s face, carrying with it the scent of the grass and warmed by the gentle light of the morning sun. Enri took a deep breath, and when she turned to look at Kaijali, he was breathing in the scent as well. Enri couldn’t resist laughing at the sight, and Kaijali scowled, trying to regain his lost dignity with a fierce expression. Perhaps the Enri of the past would have been afraid, but Enri was used to life with the goblins now, and she knew this was just how he smiled.

On this refreshing, cool and clear day, Enri proceeded to the house next to hers.

It had been left ownerless from the tragedy that had befallen their village recently, and had become the home of the alchemists from E-Rantel, the Bareares.

The house was occupied by two people, Lizzie Bareare, the wizened old woman and her grandson, Enri's good friend Nfirea Bareare. The two of them spent their days cooped up in the house, processing herbs to make potions and other medicines.

Not working closely with other villagers was a good reason to be isolated, and in the worst case scenario, to be kicked out of the village. But it was different for those two.

In every village, an apothecary — someone who could prepare medicines in case of disease or injury — was indispensable. They could be said to be important enough that the villagers would plead, "you don't need to do anything except make medicine for us".

This went double for a place like Carne Village, which had no access to priests who could use healing magic. For larger villages, priests would double as the village apothecary.

Priests would charge an appropriate fee for their healing magic. Or rather, it might be better to say that they would need to charge the fee. If the villagers could not afford to pay, then they would offer up their labour instead. For those who lacked the ability to even do that, the priests would use medicines compounded from herbs, since herbal cures were less expensive than magical healing.

One of the goblins in the village was a cleric, and he could heal minor wounds with ease, but the villagers had come together with the opinion that he should save up his power for an emergency, unless someone was very badly hurt . Not to mention, the cleric’s healing spells were very limited and lacked the ability to heal diseases or neutralize poisons.

Even so, despite the vital job they performed, the villagers didn’t dare to go near them.

The reason for this was abundantly clear as one approached the Bareares’ residence.

Enri scrunched up her nose, as did Kaijali. The house they were approaching was wreathed in an acrid odor. All things considered, it wasn’t actually that bad, but it still felt awful. The smell released from crushing up herbs might be off-putting, but ultimately it was only the scent of plants, and was not dangerous in itself.

Breathing through her mouth, Enri knocked on the door.

She knocked quite a few times, but nobody answered the door. Just when she thought nobody was home, the sound of someone approaching came from the other side, and after a lock was hastily fumbled with, the door opened.

—!?

She did not want to react with her expression or words, but the smell coming from inside the house was truly horrific.

It was painful.

A harsh, stinging pain seared her eyes, nose and mouth. Worse still, the vile stench from inside the house suggested that the miasma around the house was nothing more than what had leaked out from inside.

“Good morning, Enri!”

Nfirea’s eyes, which were visible from between the gaps in his long hair, were wide open and blood-shot. He must have stayed up all night for alchemical experiments again.

She did not want to open her mouth to speak when she was enveloped by the eye-watering gas, but it would be rude not to return a greeting.

“G-good morning, Enfi.”

She felt her throat dry out as she said that.

“Morning, Ani-san.”

“Ah, good morning, Kai… Kaijali-san… Huh, it’s morning already? I was working so hard I didn’t notice. Seeing the sun makes me realize how the time just flew by… ahhh, I’ve been doing so many experiments recently, I need to get out of the house.”

Nfirea stretched like a cat and yawned.

“Looks like you’ve been burning the midnight oil, huh—”

Enri was about to add “breakfast’s ready, come over with your Obaa-chan”, but Nfirea interrupted. Or rather, instead of saying he interrupted her, it might be better to say that she was overwhelmed by his boyish enthusiasm.

“It’s amazing, Enri!”

Nfirea rushed up to her. His work clothes reeked of that same stinging odor which filled the rest of the house. Although Enri wanted very much to back away from him, she forced herself to endure it, because Nfirea was her dear friend.

“What, what happened, Enfi?”

“You’ve got to hear this! We finally managed to perfect the procedure for brewing a new type of potion. This is going to change the world! Even though all we did was to mix the herbs that we gathered into the solution, we managed to produce a purple potion!”

The only reply he received was a “Hah?”

Enri had no idea how this was amazing. Was the potion purple because they infused purple cabbage into it?

“And it can cure wounds! The healing speed’s on par with alchemically-refined potions!”

Enri raised his hands, showing off his delicate, slender arms that were unmarred by injury. Enri thought, “I have bigger biceps than he does”, but Nfirea didn’t stop there.

“Which is to say!”

“Yes, yes, that’s wonderful, tell us about it later.”

Kaijali spoke as he took a step forward.

“Ani-san here looks like he’s been sleeping too little and partying too hard. Maybe he’s high or something? Ane-san, let me take care of this.

Why don’t you go back first?”

“Will it be all right?”

“Sure it will. I’ll splash some cold water on his face and when he calms down, I’ll bring him over. If you take too long, others will get worried. Say, what about Obaa-chan?”

“Obaa-chan’s still got her head buried in her research… I don’t think she’ll be coming for breakfast. I’m sorry, you went through all this trouble to prepare breakfast for us…”

“Ah, don’t worry about it. I was thinking that Lizzie-sama would probably be doing that.”

Situations like these had come up quite a few times already, so that wasn’t a surprise.

“Then, Ane-san, you should head back first.”

With that said, there was nothing to do but leave.

“Then, I’ll leave him to you.”

As he watched Enri leave, Kaijali turned a cold stare on Nfirea.

“Do you know what you just did? The only time a girl listens to a man talking about what he likes is if she likes the person. If she doesn’t like that person, then that blabbering’s only going to turn her off!”

“…I’m sorry, I just thought that since we made that amazing discovery… but it was really amazing! Revolutionary, even!”

Kaijali interrupted the motor-mouthed rant with a chopping motion. Clearly, Nfirea had not gotten the message he was trying to convey.

“Look, Ani-san. Are you alright with this? You’re in love with Ane-san, aren’t you?”

Nfirea replied with an “Mm,” and nodded his head vigorously.

“Then you have to make her the most important person in your heart. More important than your potions.”

“…I get it. I’ll try.”

“Do, or do not. There is no try. You need to win her heart. Me and the rest of the lads will do our best to support you. Plus, it’s not just us, even imouto-san agreed to help you out. I hope you get yourself together and do your part, Ani-san.”

“Mmm…”

“If you’re just waiting for her to say “I like you” first, then more likely than not, someone else is going to snatch her away! You’ve got to work up the courage to tell her how you really feel.”

That line pierced Nfirea’s heart like a dagger between the ribs.

“Still, despite everything I said, looks like you’ve been doing pretty well on that front yourself, Ani-san. Used to be you couldn’t even say a word in front of her. Now you can carry on a normal conversation, right?”

“That was because I didn’t have much chance to talk with Enri unless I came around to gather herbs… Now that I’ve moved into the village, I’m around her a lot more.”

“That’s it, that’s the spirit. All that’s left is to gather your courage and step up to the plate. Maybe you should show off your strength first. According to the villagers, strong men are still the most popular. Well, for the forty-nine year old women in the village, anyways.”

“I’m not too confident in my arm strength. Maybe I should do more farm work or something?”

“Nah, what you should be using is this, Ani-san,” Kaijali spoke while gently knocking on his head.

“Settle things with this. And then work your magic. If me or one of the lads think what you said was good, we’ll pose like this. That’s when you’re going to say or do something that’ll make her fall for you instantly.”

Kaijali posed to show off his shoulder muscles. They bulged mightily under his skin.

“Kinda like that. And if you need a more impressive demonstration…”

Next, Kaijali flexed his pectorals. Although he was quite short, his athletic, muscular body attested to the fact that he was a born warrior.

Nfirea wondered *Why these kind of poses?* But he couldn’t actually say that, because he’d already accepted Kaijali’s goodwill. Still, there was one question he wanted to ask.

“I… I’m curious, why are you guys doing this? I mean, I know you’re Enri’s subordinates and you’re loyal to her, but I don’t understand why you’re helping me.”

“Well, that’s simple,” Kaijali replied with an inscrutable expression on his face. In a tone better suited to coaxing little kids to behave, he replied, “That’s because we all want Ane-san to be happy. And from where we’re looking, you fit the bill. So the faster you two get married, the better.”

“N-no need for such a rush! T-the two of us can slowly reduce the distance between us, right?”

“…Wrong, actually. I mean, don’t humans take a long time between getting pregnant and having kids?”

Nfirea’s eyes went wide and his face turned bright red as the conversation suddenly jumped to the ultimate expression of male-female relationships in the form of pregnancy.

“T-that would be about nine months?”

“Hm, then it would take a really long time for about ten pups — I mean, ten kids, right?”

“Ten?! Isn’t that a bit much?!”

Five children were the average for a farming village family. In tough times when it was hard to survive to adulthood, this number would go up. In the city, this number was usually less, with the help of priests to cure diseases or the use of contraceptives.

So, a woman to giving birth to ten children wasn’t a bit much, it was way too much.

“What’re you on about? Ten’s pretty normal for us goblins.”

“We’re not goblins!”

“Alright, point taken, our races have our differences… but still, you gotta have lots of kids to make Ane-san happy.”

“…All right, I can’t deny that she might be happy with a house full of children… but it still seems kind of wrong…”

“Really?”

Nfirea was at a loss for words as he saw Kaijali looking at him with his head tilted at an angle. But on the whole, he was still grateful for their assistance. .

“Then, let’s head out, Ani-san. I hope you make a move soon. Although keeping her waiting for too long might cause problems… well, I think a steady, tactical advance on the main objective is a strategy worth pursuing.”

“Where did you learn all of this?” Nfirea shook his head. “Oi, Obaa-chan, I’m going to Enri’s for breakfast, what about you?”

The reply that came from the house was a refusal to Nfirea’s question.

Most likely, she was in the middle of repeating an experiment, and had no time to bother with trivial things such as eating.

Nfirea could relate to that feeling.

The alchemical tools and other paraphernalia in the house were of an extremely high grade, and they didn’t know how to use most of them. The maid in the service of the great magic caster Ainz Ooal Gown had brought them over. The two of them had been ordered to use these materials to produce new potions and alchemical items. Oh, and the maid had even brought some sort of cure-all herbs.

When he asked her about the solvents and the proper usage of the instruments, all he got in return was a “figure it out yourself su~”, which didn’t help things.

So, the two of them had foregone food and sleep in their ceaseless quest to learn how to use these devices for experiments. It was a slow process, but they had finally made some progress. Of course, they had made mistakes as well — Nfirea had been guilty of lots of those — but the past two months had been some of the busiest moments in Lizzie’s long life. The fruits of their labor stood on the table, that bottle of purple potion, which Lizzie examined endlessly and filled Nfirea with excited joy.

“I’ll take care of the food, then,” Nfirea spoke as he closed the door behind him. Then, turning to Kaijali, he said, “Let’s go.”

♦♦♦

Although everyone was supposed to eat together, Enri’s house wasn’t anywhere near big enough to accommodate them all. As such, they usually ate outside when the weather was good.

Because they were outdoors, a certain amount of rowdiness was expected and tolerated. Had they been inside, it might have been unbearable, but even under the present circumstances, the situation had quickly turned aggravating.

“That’s why I’m saying, Enri-nee-san is going to be my wife!”

“Hey, punk, are you forgetting the agreement we all made not to touch Ane-san?!”

“That’s right, if you try and pull a fast one on us then I’ll make my move too!”

“You what mate? I was first!”

Several goblins kicked over their chairs as they suddenly stood up, and some even jumped onto the table. Suppressing her anger with sheer force of will, Enri spoke in a gentle tone.

“Everyone, please settle down.”

That had about as much effect as a snowball on the sun. The rancor in the goblins’ eyes had not abated in the slightest.

“Just give it up, lads. The victor has already been decided. Behold, this hunk of marvelous, radiant meat!”

One of the goblins, Kuunel, raised up his spoon to prove his point, displaying a piece of chicken meat that onlookers might well have mistaken for a pea. It was nothing more than a tiny bit extra that Enri added while portioning out the food to everyone.

“I finished my meat, yet there was more at the bottom of the soup! Do *you* have anything like that? I didn’t think so! This is nothing less than the proof of love!”

“You must be kidding me! That’s nothing more than a piece of meat Ane-san mistook for a chunk of vegetable!”

“Maybe that’s just wishful thinking on your part? Maybe the “meat” you ate was just potatoes or something, and the actual meat you got was that miniature thing. You’d better watch out, it’s proof that Ane-san doesn’t like you. Plus, my god clearly told me, “You must make Enri happy.”

“Isn’t the god you believe in an evil one, Cona?!”

Half the goblins were standing, and the other half were seated and squabbling, fanning the flames of conflict. Even Nemu had somehow joined the squabbling party. Only a few people weren’t participating in this battle royale. Those people had their heads lowered to the table, and the most prominent one of them was Nfirea.

“…Powdered ruby… arcane feathers… ashwood pestle… mor… mortar… tar… tatas?”

Nfirea was muttering to himself as he spooned the food into his mouth, but the food in the spoon hadn’t even reached his mouth before it went back to the bowl. His eyes weren’t visible due to his long hair, but in all likelihood he was walking on the thin line between dreams and reality.

“Enfi, are you alright?”

The goblins were still arguing, and although it probably wasn’t safe to leave them alone for too long lest the conflict spiral out of control, Nfirea was really out of it, and she couldn’t ignore him. He was most likely suffering from sleep deprivation, judging by the way he’d begun wobbling the moment he sat down, as though he’d fall over to his side at any moment. When he actually started on breakfast, he looked like a zombie, completely bereft of life or animation.

“Ah… don’t… worry… about… me… Enri…hu…”

“Hey, Enfi, get it together!”

“Weren’t you the one who said ‘Nemu was mai waifu’ and all that earlier?”

“That was then, this is now. I only just realised it recently. I used to think since Nemu-san was ten and was about the same height as us, that she was of a marriageable age. But humans… they only consider them adults at fifteen!”

“Eh? Is that true….? Ane-san isn’t a species like hob-human??”

The goblins leapt from topic to topic with incomparable speed. Enri wanted to ask them what a ‘hob-human’ was, but before she could open her mouth, the goblins had already gotten tired of the discussion and started a whole new argument for everyone to participate in.

“Ah! You stole my bread!”

“My wolf’s still hungry, don’t be such a tightwad!”

“Everyone!”

Although Enri was shouting at this point, her voice still couldn’t carry over the racket the goblins were generating. Spoons and plates were flying, while shouts and angry roars rose and fell like waves in a storm-tossed bay. Of course, everything being thrown was empty, because none of the goblins would even dream of wasting the food Enri made for them. Still, it was utterly inexcusable.

Steeling herself, Enri furrowed her brows and took a deep breath.

“Don’t wolves eat meat? Just because you’re higher level than me, don’t go thinking I can’t whup you fist to fist!”

“Fist to fist, you say? Since you’re so hungry, how about a knuckle sandwich?”

And just as Enri stood up, everyone immediately returned to their seats and calmly resumed their meal as though nothing was wrong.

“ALL OF YOU, QUIT MAKING A RACKET!”

Enri’s furious bellow echoed across the silent air above the breakfast table.

“Ah…”

Surprised, Enri looked all around, but the only thing she could see were the goblins looking at her with expressions on their faces which said, “We were all quietly having breakfast, is that a problem”, or “being suddenly shouted at for no reason at is really vexing”. After standing silently for a while, she plopped back into her seat, red-faced.

“Pfhahahahaha!”

The first to break the silence was Nemu. Then, unable to contain herself, Enri followed suit, clutching her stomach as she laughed and then the goblins joined in as well.

That flawless coordination and timing could not have taken place without careful discussion and preparation. It was quite amazing how seriously they prepared for prank like this.

“Ah, that was just weird. Were you all planning to make fun of me from the start?”

Even though she was tearing up because she was laughing too hard, Enri made a show of being angry and asked.

“Of course, Ane-san. We wouldn’t argue about things like this for real.”

“That’s right, Ane-san.”

“Yup, yup!”

The goblins were unrepentantly blathering on, deflecting Enri’s questions with jovial expressions on their faces. In response, Enri focused on Kaijali, turning a fierce stare on him. Under her stern gaze, Kaijali wilted, averting his eyes as he responded in a small voice that abdicated all responsibility.

“You see, how do I say this… we thought Ane-san looked a little down.”

Several nearby goblins shrank away, their heads lowered as they looked around uncomfortably without saying a word.

“Everyone—”

“That’s because… we’re all Ane-san’s bodyguards.”

“That’s right!”

“Yep! Bodyguards!”

“We put a lot of thought in how to look good as your escort.”

“That’s right, that’s right. Now, Ane-san and Nemu-san, stand here, in the middle, like this…”

“Eh? I have to go over too?”

“Of course you do, now, the two of you, raise both your arms like this, that’s right, in a totally cool and awesome way…”

Even if she gave them the benefit of the doubt, this pose made them look like frogs stretching their arms out to the sky.

“Look, I understand your good intentions, and to begin with, you don’t need to be my bodyguards… right, Enfi?”

Enri turned her head to her childhood friend sitting beside her for aid, but found that there was nobody there.

She had a bad feeling about this, but still shifted her line of sight down just a little bit… and found that Nfirea’s head was resting face down in his bowl of soup.

“Enfi!”

Enri immediately scooped up the toppled Enfi, crying out as her face turned pale. Cona quickly rushed over, and peeled Nfirea’s eyes open with his fingers.

“…He’s just asleep. If you leave him like this until noon, he should be all right.”

“Enfi… what am I going to do with you?”

Enri was thinking that she should return Nfirea to his own bed. So she hefted him onto her back, and began heading out, leaving behind such conversational gems as “Shouldn’t their positions be reversed?” “Nemu-san, you can’t say these things… “ “Ani-san, you…”

After the wheat was harvested, the tax collectors would come around the village.

Enri was obviously worried about how she was going to explain the presence of the goblins in the village.

Should she say they were summoned beasts, or that they were her henchmen, or maybe she should say…

Enri had the feeling that they were always concerned about her.

It wasn’t limited to worrying about her safety, they were thinking about her feelings too. What could she do for these goblins?

What could she do for these rowdy and reliable new members of her family…

♦ ♦ ♦

Using the still-clean back of her hand to wipe off the sweat trickling down her neck, Enri bundled up the weeds she had just finished cutting. The large pile of shredded plant matter gave off the fragrance of freshly-cut grass.

Her body was tired from working long hours in the field and the way her sweat-slicked clothes clung to her body made Enri uncomfortable.

To lift her mood, Enri stretched herself out.

As she did, her eyes swept across the sprawling fields.

The wheat they'd planted had grown slowly but steadily, and as the harvest season approached, the wheat would slowly turn golden. Although a wheat field painted gold was a beautiful sight, the weeding work before that was both essential and annoying. If it wasn't done, that golden field would also be a very lonely one.

Her labour now was entirely for the sake of the harvest to come.

She straightened her body to let her stiff muscles loosen, and to let her tightly-wound body relax. The wind felt refreshingly cool on her skin that had been overheated from long hours of field work.

The wind also brought the sound of a commotion from the village to her ears.

It sounded like something banging on something, and shouts for getting people to combine their strength as one. These were sounds that had never been heard before in the village. At this moment, the village was working to turn all manner of plans and ideas into reality.

Of these plans, the ones with the highest priority were the wall surrounding the village, and the construction of the watchtowers. It went without saying that all these were projects were intended to turn the village into a fortress.

Carne Village stood at the edge of the Great Forest of Tob, and the forest was the home of many wild beasts, or in other words, dangerous territory. It would be impossible to live in peace without the protection of sturdy walls.

However, Carne Village was laid out in neat rows of houses radiating from a central square in all directions. Without anything like a wall in place, anyone could easily enter the village. Until recently, the village had been peaceful and the wild beasts did not enter, even though it was right next to the forest.

That was because the mighty creature known as the Wise King of the Forest had continually expanded its sphere of influence, and as such, no beast dared move around in the forest near the village. So the village defenses were comparable to a wall of steel.

And then, all this changed due to human intervention.

The knights of the Empire attacked the village and killed her parents. As a result, nobody in the village held on to the hope that things would go back to the way they used to be.

In contrast, the goblin troop leader, Jugem, had proposed the fortification of the village as a countermeasure against such a scenario. Once he mentioned that the goblins would be unable to protect the village if it was attacked again due to lack of their number, the motion immediately received unanimous approval from all parties concerned. This was because even now, many of the villagers were still having nightmares that woke them from their sleep.

The first step was to dismantle the unoccupied houses and use them to build a wall. Of course, those materials were insufficient on their own, so they would have to enter the forest to cut down trees for lumber. Since entering the forest’s depths might mean encroaching on the Wise King of the Forest’s territory, their harvest area had to proceed along the outskirts of the forest toward the distance.

Naturally, the goblins were the ones who provided security for the wood-cutting villagers.

As a result of them taking on that task, the villagers’ distrust of the goblins had almost completely disappeared. Part of that was because human knights, who were of the same race as themselves, had attacked them. Even if they were of the same race, they had tried to take the villagers’ lives. In contrast, the goblins worked under Enri to contribute to the village, even though they were of a different species. The decision of which side to trust was no longer one which could be easily settled by deciding along racial lines.

And the most important reason was that the goblins were strong. They could serve as warriors to take on the duties of sentries, and when people were hurt, the goblin priest Cona could heal them.

It was difficult to despise goblins like these.

In this way, the goblins managed to establish themselves in the village in just a few short days and quickly became an indispensable part of village life. This could be seen from the house the goblins lived in; no consideration had been made of the fact that they were from another race, and a large house had been built close to Enri’s own home in the middle of the village.

Although the villagers and the goblins had worked together on the village defense plan, there simply weren’t enough hands to make the work go quickly. As such, in the beginning they had only built simple fences.

As fate would have it, the Wise King of the Forest, who kept the monsters at bay from the village, became a follower of a certain black-armored warrior and abandoned its territory. Although they had managed to complete the fences with great effort, the villagers could not take joy in their accomplishment, but instead sighed about their rotten luck.

However, a sturdy wall now defended the village.

The cause for this turn for the better was the labor wrought by the stone golems that had been brought to the village by the beautiful maid that served the village’s savior — Ainz Ooal Gown.

Golems were inexhaustible constructs; when given an order they would silently execute it, and their strength far outstripped that of a human being. Although their lack of dexterity meant that they could not perform certain tasks which required precision, their participation in the work had enabled it to proceed with an unbelievable speed. With the effort of the unsleeping and untiring stone golems, the construction of the wall practically flew along.

They could accomplish the tasks which the villagers and goblins could not, such as chopping down trees and transporting them in large quantities, digging pits, or laying the foundations for the walls. What should have taken years to accomplish in theory had instead been finished in a matter of days, and the constructed wall was even bigger and sturdier than expected.

It wasn’t just the walls either; even the construction of the watchtowers had been sped up. Their current task was to complete the watchtowers on the eastern and western flanks of the village.

“Ane-san, I’m done here.”

Enri’s thoughts were interrupted by the goblin assisting her in the weeding, a goblin called Paipo.

“Ah, thank you.”

“No, no, it’s nothing Ane-san should thank me for.”

Although Paipo waved his dirt and grass-stained hands to ward off Enri’s thanks, Enri still felt that she owed the goblins a debt that could never be repaid.

After losing her parents, Enri was in a dire situation, where tending her family’s plot by herself would be impossible. She wanted to ask the other villagers for help, but given the overall lack of manpower in the village, it was already hard enough for every household to take care of their own crops. With the help of the goblins, that problem was easily resolved. In addition, she was hardly the only one the goblins had helped.

Turning to the direction from which her name was called, Enri saw a busty woman standing by a field. Beside her was a goblin.

“Thank you so much, Enri-chan. Because of Goblin-san’s help, the field work’s almost done.”

“Really? That’s wonderful. It was their idea to help out with the village chores, so if you want to thank someone, you should thank them.”

“Ah, I’ve already thanked Goblin-san. He said that he was only your subordinate, so he hoped that I would thank Ane-san as well.”

Hearing the word “Ane-san” made Enri furrow her brows, which was quickly followed by faked laughter to drive it off.

The goblins themselves had suggested that they should help the households who had lost farmhands in the attack, and the woman before her was one of those people.

There was no way the villagers would shun the contributions of the goblins. In Carne Village, the opinion of the goblins was so good that statements like “goblins are even better neighbors than humans” were commonly heard.

“Speaking of which, are there any other goblin-sans around? I wanted to treat everyone to a meal as thanks.”

“The others should be patrolling the village or helping the people who just moved into the village. But since obaa-san asked, then I’ll make sure to tell them.”

“Then I’ll leave that to you, Enri-chan. When the time comes, I’ll make sure everyone gets to enjoy a feast made with all my skill. In the meantime, I think I’ll make lunch for Goblin-san first.”

“Really? Then, since I’ve been invited, it would be rude to refuse. Ane-san, though I’m sorry that I can’t join you, I’ll be having lunch at Morga-san’s place.”

Enri nodded, and the woman headed back to the village with the goblin in tow.

“If the newly-arrived people realised that you guys are not bad people, that would be great.”

“Well, a lot of them didn’t look happy to see us. After all, in their hearts we should be the enemy.”

“Apart from our village, treating demihumans as the enemy is the norm, right…”

“That’s why we’re sending so many people to help the villagers with their work. It’s not easy.”

“But, but we’ve cleared up a fair bit of their suspicions. I just saw how they can greet you normally.”

“About that, well, quite a few of these people are like the villagers and have memories of family members who were attacked and died. Or rather, the memories they bear might be even heavier than that.

Although Carne Village had been devastated by the attack, about half of the villagers managed to survive. On the other hand, a lot of the other villages which had been attacked by knights had lost a large portion of their people.

When Carne Village began taking in immigrants, many of the ones who came were survivors of those villages.

The two of them fell into silence.

Enri stretched her waist once more and looked to the sky. Although the lunch bell hadn’t rung yet, it seemed like it was about time. They had worked enough of the field to take a break as well.

“Then, shall we have lunch?”

Despite his scary looks, Paipo managed what was instantly recognizable as a smile.

“That would be great, Ane-san’s meals are always delicious.”

“Oh, they’re not that great,” Enri replied, slightly embarrassed.

“No, no, I’m serious. Helping Ane-san in the fields is one of the most hotly contested positions among us. That’s because we get to eat your delicious lunches.”

“Ahaha, then should I make lunch for everyone as well? Like breakfast?”

There were quite a few reasons why it would be hard to. For instance, there was a difference between lunch for three and lunch for twenty. Just slicing the vegetables would become a chore in itself. In addition, she had to make sure everyone had sufficient portions, which would be a tiring task. That said, in comparison to the amount of hard work the goblins had put in and the praise they had received in turn, it was nothing at all.

“Oh, no, we couldn’t impose on you for that. Plus, enjoying Ane-san’s handmade lunch is something like a special privilege for the one who wins the right to help you.”

Enri could only smile back in response to the diminutive demihuman. Although she knew the goblins decided who would take the job via rock-scissors-paper, Enri didn’t know if she was cooking something that actually deserved all the praise.

“Then, shall we break for lunch?”

“Ah, it’s wonderful…”

Paipo’s words were interrupted halfway as he looked to the distance with his keen eyes. With a deep breath, the formerly relaxed and cheerful little demihuman became a veteran warrior in an instant. Enri followed Paipo’s eyesight into the distance.

What they were looking at was a goblin riding a black wolf. They seemed to glide across the plain as they approached the village at high speed.

“It’s Kiumei…”

Of the goblin troop that Enri had summoned, twelve were level 9 goblins, two were level 10 goblin archers, one was a level 10 goblin mage, one was a level 10 goblin priest, two were level 10 goblin wolf riders and one was a level 12 goblin leader. In total, there were 19 goblins.

Kaijali from this morning and Paipo who had helped with the chores were level 8, while Kiumei, who was wearing leather armor and carrying a lance, was a level 10 goblin wolf rider.

The goblin riders’ job was to patrol the plains and act as scouts. The riders periodically returning to the village to deliver reports was a common sight.

”…Looks like it.”

However, Paipo’s tone was very somber. It made her think that something bad had happened.

“What’s wrong?”

“…He’s back a little early. He should have been prowling the forest today… did something happen?”

After hearing Paipo’s explanation, a surge of unease rose in Enri’s heart, and she feared that some bloody disaster awaited them.

While the two of them waited in silence, the large wolf Kiumei rode on arrived in front of Enri. From its rapid breathing, she could guess how much of a hurry he had been to get back here.

“What’s the matter?”

Hearing Paipo’s question, Kiumei bowed to Enri from on top of his wolf while replying, “Something’s happened in the forest.”

“…what?”

“I’m not too sure, but I think it’s like before. A whole bunch of unknown guys are moving towards the north.”

“Are they knights?”

Enri unwittingly interrupted the two of them. Even though she was powerless to change anything, she still could not ignore the conversation. She still could not forget her fear when the village had been attacked.

The “whole lot of unknown guys heading north” they talked about was referring to the tracks they found of thousands of people on the march to the north. Although the prints were similar in size to those of humans, they were made by bare feet, so in the end they had concluded that those people were not humans.

“I don’t have any conclusive evidence, but I think it’s different from that time. If you ask me, I’d say something’s happening deep inside the forest.”

“Is that so.”

Hearing that, Enri couldn’t help but sigh in relief.

“…Then, I’d better go report to the boss.”

“All right. Thanks for your hard work.”

“It’s a pleasure to serve.”

After waving to the two of them, Kiumei spurred his wolf on and departed. Enri and Paipo watched him enter the slowly-opening village doors.

“Then, shall we go back, too?”

“Yes, let’s.”

After washing their hands beside the well, Enri and Paipo had just reached home when they heard a young girl’s voice.

“Welcome back, onee-chan.”

Along with the voice came the sound of rock grinding against rock. Following the sound to its source, Enri saw Nemu turning a millstone behind the house.

A pungent smell came from the millstone. Although it was similar to the smell that had clung to Enri’s hands just before, it was several times more intense, enough that one could smell it from some distance away.

Nemu was used to the smell, which was all well and good, but Enri's eyes almost teared up as the odor assaulted her. Paipo, standing behind her, seemed unaffected in comparison. It remained to be seen whether that was because the smell only had an effect on certain species, or because it would be terribly rude to make a face like that to his mistress' little sister.

"I'm home. How's things? Did you grind it up like I told you?"

"Mm, I did. Have a look."

Following Nemu's line of sight, she saw that the herbs that she had piled up before she had left the house had been reduced to a small handful.

"Aren't I great? There's not much more left."

Before she had left the house, Enri had asked Nemu to help her grind the herbs into a paste. That was because some herbs had to be dried to be preserved, but others needed to be shredded to be preserved.

"Uwah, Nemu's been working really hard!"

Enri opened her arms to praise Nemu, and a smug expression blossomed on Nemu’s face. Whether she had been praised by Nfirea, or simply because she wanted to help her sister out, Nemu had diligently and quickly accomplished her tasks.

Herbs made up a major portion of Carne Village’s income. It could be said to be the one specialty export that didn’t require much manpower for a frontier village .

Given that it was a crucial method for them to obtain valuable currency, all of Carne Village’s residents knew at least a little about herbs and where they grew.

Enri silently considered for a moment. The herbs from Carne Village were incredibly profitable. However, they could only be gathered within an extremely short window of time before the flowers bloomed, and could only be treated as a temporary income at best. Although all the places they knew had been fully harvested, if they just delved a little bit into the forest, they might be able to find clumps of herbs which had not yet been touched.

Of course, those woods were where the wild things were, and they were hardly a place where people like Enri could just stroll into for a picnic. However, now they had the goblins and Nfirea's broad experience as a herbalist. If only she could get their help, they should be able to make a great deal of money.

After some hesitation, Enri spoke of her plan to Paipo.

“I want to go to a new place to pick herbs, could you come with me?”

Logically speaking, there was no need for Enri to go herself. All she needed to do was to ask the goblins, who could take care of themselves, to go into the Great Forest on her behalf. However, the goblins she had summoned had a strange weakness.

That was to say, they had no aptitude at all for herb-picking, butchering animals, and that sort of work.

Similarly to how they handled cooking, even if one handed goblins a sample of a herb, they would not be able to match it up with identical herb in front of them. The surprising thing was, it was as though they were born unable to do that sort of thing, or even learn it, as if someone had removed the capacity to do so from them.

Therefore, if they were assigned to pick herbs, the goblins needed to have someone else with them.

“It should be all right, but it might be a little difficult for Ane-san to come with us.”

“Hm? Why’s that?”

“Well, like Kiumei said, there’s some kind of change in the depths of the forest. If that’s the case, the inside of the forest would be in a state of chaos now.”

Seeing the surprised expression on Enri's face, Paipo patiently explained himself.

"Even the cautious ones would want to expand their territory. If that's the case, then for a while, their territory is going to overlap with the others, and that's going to cause all sorts of havoc. Simply put, the chances of meeting a monster's going to increase, and so will the danger. And if you're unlucky, you might even run into something outside the forest. Ane-san's fearless and cool, but there's no need for you to personally walk into danger."

"Is that so…"

Although she wasn't quite sure about the fearless and cool part, that was probably the goblins way of talking her up among themselves, Enri thought.

"There was also that big movement earlier. What happened there?"

"I don't know. Originally, we should have sent someone familiar with the Great Forest's conditions to investigate. …but if we go, the village's defenses will be weakened…. ah, got it! Why not hire adventurers to check it out?"

"That could be difficult," Enri said, knitting her eyebrows. "According to Enfi, the cost of hiring an adventuring party is very high. Although the lords of E-Rantel will subsidize some of those costs, it’ll be very hard for a village like us to pay for adventurers out of our own pocket.”

“I see…”

“Collecting lots of herbs and selling them afterwards should help with one part of that problem… otherwise, all we can do is sell off the items we got from Gown-sama.”

She had received two horns from Ainz Ooal Gown. Although one of them had disappeared after she used it, the other was safely hidden in Enri’s home.

“Forget about that, Ane-san. We’d rather you just blow the horn instead.”

“Of course, there’s no way I’d sell it.”

Enri didn’t want to become the sort of despicable person who would sell off a gift given out of goodwill. There also existed the possibility that it might not even be possible to sell it off, so she decided not to do so. Even now they were still benefiting from the generosity of the maid who had brought the golems to the village. She would never commit such an ungrateful deed.

“But that’s going to be problematic. The herbs can only be gathered in this season, so although it’s a bit dangerous, I still have to…”

Enri smiled to Nemu, who had a worried expression on her face. She didn’t want to hurt the last surviving member of her family, nor did she want to pass up this chance to make lots of money. Although, when she considered her priorities, that was clearly a mistake. Rather, she should bet her life for the good of the entire village and repay the goblins who considered her their mistress.

I need to earn more money and see what kind of gear I can buy for the goblins. Full body armor looks like it could protect very well. Speaking of full body armor, there’s that gentleman in the black-colored armor… what was his name again?

Although she didn’t know how much armor and weapons cost, she was fairly certain that it wouldn’t be a small sum. At this moment, Paipo held out his hand in front of Enri, indicating that she should hold on a little.

“Erm… although this is just my personal opinion, maybe you should talk it over with the boss? Ane-san doesn’t need to make the decision so early. I don’t want to be scolded by the boss because I opened my mouth without thinking. Plus, I think Ani-san would like to get his hands on herbal ingredients too.”

Just as Enri’s troubles were filling her head, an adorable gurgling sound came from beside her. Turning to look, she saw Nemu looking at her with a frown on her face.

“Onee-chan, I’m hungry, let’s go eat.

“Mm, sorry. Then, wash your hands after we pack up. I’ll go get things ready.”

“Kay~”

Nemu’s response was full of energy. After taking apart the millstone, she scraped the accumulated green paste into a small urn. Enri returned to the house, wondering what she should make for lunch.

Part 2

Enri stood before the Great Forest of Tob. Of course, she was not alone. Beside her were the assembled members of the Goblin Troop.

The goblins were equipped with chain shirts, round shields and sturdy machetes, which hung from their belts. They wore brown-colored tunics under their armor and furred leather boots on their feet. On their belts were bags for small items. One could not say they were under-geared.

The fully-armed goblins made their final checks of their personal equipment. They topped up their waterskins and made sure their machetes were sharpened.

Everyone was well-geared, but they carried little baggage. That was because the plan was to swiftly complete their work, and not to mount a long expedition in the forest.

Not everyone in the troop was assigned to Enri's protection. Their objective was to thoroughly scout the surrounding area and further verify the information the goblin wolf riders had collected. That is to say, they were to carefully observe the current situation within the Great Forest. In order to protect the village, the goblins had decided to scout its surroundings and the hinterlands.

Only three goblins would accompany Enri.

Them, and one more person: Nfirea. He had made his preparations too, dressed in suitable clothing for collecting herbs in a forest. With Nfirea around, the herb harvesting trip would definitely be a success.

Perhaps he had sensed Enri looking at him, and turned around, asking “What’s the matter?” Although Enri had waved her hands as though to say “nothing, nothing,” one of the surrounding goblins took notice and drew closer to Enri’s side.

He was a goblin whose body was so muscular and athletic that it would be hard for bystanders to think that he was a goblin. His torso was protected by a crude, but practical breastplate, and the greatsword he used was sheathed on his back.

This was Jugem, the leader of the goblins, named after a fairytale goblin ranger called ‘Jugem Juugem’ by Enri. As an aside, there were other named knights who did battle alongside the goblin ranger, and their names were also used for the other goblins.

“There shouldn’t be anything wrong… what’s the matter?”

“No, really, it’s fine! I was just looking at him.”

“That’s great, after all, once you’re in the forest, you can lose your life over even a tiny slip. If anything’s wrong, anything at all, you tell me.”

“That’s right, Ane-san. Just like we agreed before, we’re all scouting the forest, so if anything happens and we can’t get there in time… it’ll be okay, right?”

Jugem’s brutish face contorted with what looked like an expression of worry, and he glanced at Enri’s face. Seeing that, Enri smiled and replied to him.

“It’ll be fine. We won’t go too deep, and they’ll protect me.”

“That’s good to hear…”

Jugem followed Enri’s line of sight to the three goblins ahead of them. Then he shouted.

“Oi! You punks! You’d better not let Ane-san take so much as a single scratch, got it?!”

“Got it!”

The three goblins, Gokoh, Kaijali and Unlai, responded with a hearty shout.

“And Ani-san, you’ll be taking care of Ane-san too, right?”

Enri suddenly noticed that Kaijali, for no apparent reason, was flexing his muscles in a front double biceps pose.

“You mean I should take over from here?… kah! Of course! You can count on me to protect Enri!”

For a moment, Enri imagined Nfirea showing his shiny teeth as he radiated self-confidence through his smile. His attitude now was very different from his usual one, and to be honest it felt kind of gross. However, that was probably just his excitement about trekking into the forest.

Just like a little boy, Enri smiled, feeling like she was his big sister.

“Thank you, Enfi. I’ll be in your care.”

Strange, is he doing a side chest pose now…? What’s with that?

“Ahhh, that again… oh, about that, I prepared a bunch of alchemical items that I made myself, so leave it to me!”

After seeing Nfirea’s second sparkly smile, the smile fell off Enri’s face.

“Uh… mm. You go do that.”

“Ah, well, it’s been settled… although. Honestly speaking, even if we weren’t doing this dangerous job, this…”

Jugem turned to look at Enri, showing her a sour expression. Enri was starting to get a little annoyed after hearing this question again after answering it so many times in the village, but because he was only asking out of concern for her, she couldn't just ignore it.

"That might be true, but the fact remains that without the herbs, we can't get any money…"

"How about animal skins? We can get those."

"That's not a bad idea, but herbs are the most valuable."

Animal pelts and medicinal herbs were in completely different price categories. The difference was comparable to that between the heavens and the earth. Granted, some especially rare animals had skins that were worth a fortune, but those were few and far between.

"If Ani-san could share his…"

"We're combining the accounts of the Bareares and ourselves. We work together and split the benefits. We can't just take it all for ourselves."

Helping each other in difficult situations was a keystone of village life — as such, it was only expected that eighty percent of their income would be earmarked for the community's benefit. This was also why greedy and selfish households could not be established, because such behavior would never be permitted. Self-sufficiency was a strict requirement.

The two of them started looking away from Nfirea, who was quietly saying, “Kaijali-san, please read the mood and stop making those weird poses…”

“If that’s the case, then it’s definitely… and like that too… well, if you lived with Ani-san, you could certainly pool the wealth… but… looks like nothing’s stopping that…”

Jugem’s words gradually lost their force. He knew that he couldn’t stop Enri from entering the Great Forest.

Although Enri didn’t want to make things difficult for Jugem and the others who cared for her, she would not be swayed from her course.

After all, she had decided to venture into the forest despite knowing its dangers because she had heard Jugem say, “We can’t repair our gear”.

Whetstones helped, of course, but caring for and repairing metal weapons required the services of a professional blacksmith. Which meant that a subtle danger threatened all the goblins. If their equipment deteriorated, it would mean their lives would be in danger. The maintenance of their battle gear was essential.

What could she do for them, who had pledged their lives to protect hers? She couldn’t just hide in safety and enjoy the fruits of their labour. Just as they had given their all for her, she too had to do everything she could for them. That was Enri’s decision.

The goblins weren’t just Enri’s bodyguards, they were the village’s protectors. If she decided to press that point, she could probably extort the required money to equip the goblins from the villagers. However, Enri decided to give up on that idea.

No matter what, Enri was simply trying to repay the goblins’ service through her own efforts. This expedition was the proof of that.

“Normally, the safest thing to do would be to confirm the area was free of danger before you went in..."

Interrupting from behind was the goblin mage, Dyno.

She was an arcane magic caster who wore a humanoid skull for a helmet.

In her hands was a staff that was even taller than herself, made of simple, gnarled wood. She dressed in some form of exotic full-body tribal costume that managed to emphasize her meager bust. Her face seemed softer than those of the male goblins. Enri could recognize this because she was their mistress, but normal people probably wouldn’t be able to pick up on those details.

“However, you can’t confirm it’s safe, can you?”

“Mm, that’s right. Sadly, we can’t do that. The most we can do is confirm that the forest seems peaceful, but even that needs time. And if we want to find out when tensions are going to run high again, that’ll take even more time.

If they did that, they would miss the opportunity to gather the desired herbs. After hearing Dyno’s words, a firm conviction gathered in her eyes and she made her reply.

“It’ll be fine, we won’t go too deep.”

After hearing her repeat that answer several times, Jugem realized that he couldn’t change Enri’s mind. Instead, he looked to the three goblins who would travel with her. What he told them was the same as what he had said to them before.

“We won’t be able to protect Ane-san, so you guys are going to have to do it for us. You’d better keep her safe! And Ani-san too!”

“Got it!”

“It would be safest if we’d all stuck together as usual. Splitting up our fighting strength is just asking for trouble.”

Dyno muttered under her breath.

“If we did that, then we’d be forced into reacting to the enemy, right?”

“That’s right. If any of the monsters coming to the village decide to settle down in the forest, getting rid of them for good would be extremely troublesome. Once they build a nest, they’ll never leave. Even if we chased them away, they’d come right back after a while.”

Since the balance of power in the forest had changed, reconnoitering the Great Forest — especially the area surrounding the village — was critical.

This was the first pass. The first pass implied that the danger was the greatest. As such, they could only arrange for three people to be Enri’s escorts.

“Good. Well then, let’s move! Finish up here and meet up with Ane-san!”

In response to Jugem’s call, the goblin troop thundered their assent.

♦♦♦

The interior of the Great Forest.

Although they had only travelled about a hundred and fifty meters in, the temperature had fallen by several degrees. This was simply because no sunlight shone in here. That said, the interior was not completely pitch-dark, and Enri could still see what was happening around her. It was like being in a room with the air-conditioner turned up to full blast. In this way, Enri and the other four members of her party advanced into the forest.

At the moment, the forest was dominated by silence. Apart from the gentle sounds of the tree branches swaying and the occasional cries of birds or beasts, there was nothing else. The footsteps of Enri and her companions echoed loudly. The other team led by Jugem had already gone deeper in, and they could no longer be heard.

Enri and company formed a roughly triangular formation as they advanced into the forest. In the center of the formation were Enri and Nfirea.

It was very difficult to maintain a wide formation in the forest. Normally, they would have gone single file, but in order to protect the two of them the goblins had insisted on doing things that way. They lost speed as a result, but that couldn’t be helped.

As they moved deeper inwards, Nfirea began looking up and towards the north.

He was looking for the treasure sleeping in the dense forest — medicinal herbs.

Enri was not a novice to herb-gathering. A girl her age would know all about herbs that could be taken orally or smeared on an affected area, or the ordinary herbs used as ingredients for potions. However, in this field she was completely outmatched by Nfirea. Not only was he thoroughly familiar with medicinal herbs, he even knew which ones were useful as bases for alchemical compounds.

“Found any rare herbs?”

Of all the questions Enri had asked, this seemed like the one he had been waiting for. The surrounding goblins took their poses.

A double bicep flex again… is that the latest trend or what?

The tilt-headed Enri did not notice the faint expression of annoyance on Nfirea’s face.

“Why didn’t I tell them to stop posing… it sucks to have no courage. Then, is there a brown moss over there?”

As it turned out, there was brown moss growing where Nfirea had pointed.

“That’s Bebeyamokugoke. Mix some with a healing potion and it’ll slightly improve its effects.“

“Oh, really? I thought it was just a simple patch of moss and missed it. Without Enfi, I probably would have ignored it completely. As expected of Enfi.”

“Really now, Ani-san’s pretty amazing. Is it worth a lot?”

“It’s worth quite a bit of money… ah, wait. Don’t pick it. What Enri and I are aiming for is worth even more. If we can’t find it, then we’ll pick this on the way back.”

“I see. Yeah, we got it. Speaking of which, to Ani-san, this forest must be like a treasure trove, since it’s so easy to make wealth. Ah~ with Ani-san I feel much more at ease.”

“This sort of thing—”

The surrounding goblins’ poses changed.

“Yes, hm, well, it might actually be like that. One thing’s for sure, people travelling with me won’t have a hard time. I’m pretty confident of that.”

“Mmm. Enfi can definitely do that.”

An awkward mood flowed through the sleeping forest.

“Then, Ane-san, is that all?”

“Hm? Kaijali-san, what do you mean?”

“Hm? No, I actually, nothing… ah… come to think of it, there’s a question I forgot to ask. What sort of herbs are you looking for?”

“We didn’t tell you? It’s a herb called Enkaishi. Afterwards we’ll let Nemu grind it up.”

“Ah, so that’s what it is. Got it. Although, even if you describe it to us, we won’t be able to tell the difference. Then, let’s move on.”

Step by step, they ventured further into the forest. As they went on, their noses started itching from the thick scent of the forest’s fragrance.

There was no sign of human activity here at all. Immersed in this place, Nfirea felt like this was a world where humans were weak and tiny. Then, he opened his mouth to speak.

“Let’s start looking around here. We’re looking for places with lots of shade and humidity… are there any water sources nearby? That herb grows near them. There’s no sign of monster activity around here, what a stroke of luck.”

With his vast experience as a herbalist, it was unlikely for Nfirea to make a mistake.. The goblins and Enri replied in approval.

The group put their things down and the burden on them decreased greatly.

“Ahhh… Ane-san, could you go give Ani-san a hand?”

“Ah, yes, that’s right. Enfi must have his hands full by himself.”

Enri walked over to where Nfirea had put down his luggage and assisted him in his labors.

“Thanks, Enri.”

“No problem, Enfi. Although, now that I think of it, all this specialist equipment is amazing. You need so many things…”

Out of the corner of her eyes, Enri could see the goblins nodding in a wordless “very good, very good” manner. Although she was surprised by why they were so happy, she eventually decided that her first priority was getting the job done.

“Then, let’s start the search!”

With a throttled “Oh!” to keep the noise down, they began. The goblins watched the perimeter, while Enri and Nfirea began gathering the herbs.

Although Enri had been prepared for the work to be difficult, they were fortunate and soon found growths of Enkaishi. The dense sheets grew thickly in the cracks of tree trunks.

“It’s over there. We found where they grew right away. As I thought, it’s best when I’m with Enfi.”

“No, it’s nothing like that. We’re lucky we found it in a deserted area. If there were monster tracks, it would be pretty nasty.”

To the two humans, the large quantity of herbs, while not exactly a treasure in its own right, was akin to a small mountain of coins. Enri desperately fought the desire burning in her heart. This place was dangerous, it was better that she put her greed aside and worked to steadily complete the job.

However, Enri knelt down, and began to pluck, minding the roots of the herbs.

Enkaishi’s medicinal value resided in its roots. But you couldn’t just pull the roots out like that. Grasses like these were incredibly hardy, and they would grow again as long as the roots remained. It seemed a shame, but depleting this patch of herbs (which had been quite a challenge to find in the first place) by overharvesting it would be like killing the goose which laid the golden egg.

A strong odor seared her nose as she did the picking, but since she was used to that sort of thing, the smell didn’t impede her work. Compared to Nfirea’s house, this smell was like heaven.

She plucked the herbs stalk by stalk, holding the harvest under her armpits to avoid crushing it by accident, and then carefully placed it into the bag. If the goblins came to help, they would probably have finished faster, but they were too busy watching their surroundings. Enri wasn’t nearly stupid enough to take them off their sentry duty to help her.

In comparison, Nfirea’s harvesting methods were like poetry in motion. He swiftly pulled them out of the ground without pause, in such a way that didn’t damage their potency as medicine. This technique would even impress fellow professionals in his field.

Enri silently watched Nfirea, who was staring at the herbs with a diligent expression on his face. The face that had become so familiar looked like someone else’s before her.

…He’s a man now.

“…What’s happened?”

Nfirea suddenly raised his head. He must have sensed the stoppage in Enri’s work.

Although she’d done nothing, Enri still lowered her head in embarrassment.

“Ah, well, I think Enfi’s amazing…”

“Really? I didn’t think it was that fantastic. I’m only a dabbler when it comes to herbalism. This level is about par for the course.”

“…Is that so.”

“I guess.”

The conversation ended thus, and in the slow passage of time, the stock of herbs in their backpacks grew. After filling up slightly more than half of their packs, the goblins crouched next to the two of them, as if looking for somewhere to hide.

Seeing Enri’s surprised face, Kaijali silently gave a hand signal. This was an emergency. Enri, who understood, pricked up her ears. From the distance came the sound of plants being trampled underfoot.

“This is…”

“Something’s coming. It’s coming for us… or rather, it’s advancing and most likely it’s going to end up here, so we need to get away from here for a bit.”

“…Then, we won’t need the noisemaker decoys?”

“That’s right, Ani-san. It’s better if we don’t have to use those, it feels like things will go bad if we do. Now let’s move.”

The five of them began moving away from the direction of the sound, hiding in the shadow of a nearby tree. They didn’t go further because they didn’t want to chance making noise on nearby vegetation. If the other party was just advancing forward, there was no need to risk discovery like that.

Since the tree wasn’t very big, it couldn’t hide all of them. The most they could do was crouch at its roots and hope they weren’t too obvious.

Like this, the five held their breaths and prayed that the source of the sound would turn in another direction. But unfortunately, this did not happen, and the figure making the noise finally came into Enri’s field of view.

“Eh?!”

A tiny gasp of surprise escaped from Enri’s mouth.

It was a ragged-looking little goblin.

His body was covered in tiny wounds which bled profusely. His breathing was rapid and uneven, and the smell of his blood and sweat spread throughout the area.

Even though goblins were already smaller than humans, this goblin was small even for another goblin. To Enri and the goblin’s trained observation skills, they came to the same answer of “child”.

The goblin child looked fearfully to his rear, in the direction where he had come from. There was no need to listen up for the sound of trampling plant life that followed from behind him. From the looks of things, they were hunter and prey.

He frantically moved his spasming feet, taking cover in a patch of shade different from Enri's own.

“That—”

“—Quiet.”

Gokoh had not even looked at Enri as he interrupted her. Those unrelenting eyes were fixed on the direction where the kid had come from.

Just over ten seconds later, the hunter revealed itself.

It was a huge magical beast that resembled a black wolf. The reason why they could instantly tell it was no ordinary wolf was because of the chain wrapped around its body. The serpentine chain did not hinder its movements at all, as though it were merely an illusion. And two horns sprang from its head.

Nfirea muttered the name of the beast to himself.

“Barghest…”

Although it could not possibly have heard him to answer, the barghest barked like a dog. Then — its face twisted. It was an evil grin that no mere beast could ever make. It slowly looked around its surroundings and its eyes settled on the tree where the goblin child had hidden.

Just like the beast it resembled, the barghest had a bloodhound’s scenting ability. There was no way it could not sniff out the goblin child who had bled so much on the way here.

From the look of things, the reason why the goblin had managed to get here wasn’t because he could resist the barghest. Rather, it was because the barghest was a sadistic creature; or maybe it was because it was a hunter that liked to play with its food.

Suddenly, the barghest stopped moving, surprise knotting its face, and it stared at the place they had gathered the herbs from.

Ah—

Enri pulled her face back. The others quickly followed suit.

Behind the tree trunk, Enri opened her hands. Her skin was green and speckled with stray bits of plant matter. Beside her, Nfirea did the same thing.

The sap and juices from the herbs we picked…

This was the same sort of thing that Nemu was soaked in when she ground up the herbs. Although those with numbed noses (like themselves) wouldn’t mind, but the powerful stench still hung in the air. Her heart raced, and Enri thought it was annoying.

“It’s started moving. …Is it coming this way? Hasn’t noticed us, has it?”

Unlai, with his ear on the tree to listen, flashed a querying hand sign.

“…are you telling me it can’t use its sense of smell?”

“What do you mean, Ani-san? Don’t monsters have very sensitive noses…?”

“It’s because of that,” Nfirea said as he explained himself.

The key point was that because it had an extremely sensitive sense of smell, the stench floating in this area was particularly effective against it. The barghest had confused the scent of Enri’s hands and bag with that of the already-harvested areas. Even better, the smell had covered up their original scent.

It was also possible that the barghest had torn up the herbs to smoke the goblin child out.

Although the powerful stench was everywhere, if they fled in haste, the displaced air from where they were fleeing might catch the barghest’s attention.

“Then, let’s use the kid as a sacrifice and be done with it. We don’t know how strong this barghest is, and engaging it without prior knowledge would be too risky.”

These cold words made Enri look at Gokoh’s face.

However, these words were logical ones. The goblins put Enri’s personal safety as their top priority. With that in mind, avoiding combat with that magical beast was only to be expected. They would sacrifice one of their own kind for that without a second thought.

The words he said, judging by their conviction, were not mistaken at all.

However, Enri hated this sort of thing. Even if they were of different species, not helping someone you could help would disgrace herself as a human being.

Who knew, if she had not been a silly village girl who had never known a goblin attack and lacked a sense of danger, she might not have thought that way.

Enri looked around to the others. The goblins knew Enri’s wish. They just didn’t want to speak it. After that, Enri looked to Nfirea.

“Enfi…”

“Haa… I’ll help. Who knows, that goblin child might become a valuable source of information. If we don’t find out why he fled here, it might end up causing danger to the village.

The goblins knitted their brows.

“Is there a chance you might lose?”

“Certainly. But if that’s a barghest, we’re in luck. Greater barghests are pretty strong. But from the look of that guy’s chains and the size of his horns, I don’t think he’s of that type. If it’s just a barghest, we’re sure to win.”

“Wait a minute. Ane-san is going to stay here, right? You should avoid danger.”

Enri swallowed. She knew what she was saying was only to satisfy her ego, and her foolish words would endanger not just herself but the others around her. But even so, Enri still opened her mouth to speak.

“…If we abandon someone we could have helped, it would be as bad as tormenting him ourselves. I don’t want to be like those people who harm the weak. Please!”

Kaijali, who had been watching Enri’s earnest expression, sighed in defeat. At the same time, the monster’s strange bark rang out. They could clearly hear the sound of mocking laughter within it. In response came the goblin child’s pitiful wail.

There was no more time for confusion or debate.

“It can’t be helped. Get him, lads!”

The goblins took the lead in jumping out, followed by Nfirea.

Enri felt a terribly wrenching pain in her heart as she watched the warriors who went into battle to fulfil her wishes.

All she could do was watch them from behind.

Then, Enri thought, *at the very least I should stay here and watch them, without allowing myself to lose focus for even a single moment.*

The four who had leapt out saw the barghest pressing the goblin child down beneath it. The goblin child sported new wounds but was not dead yet, because the barghest had the bad habit of toying with its prey.

The barghest’s movements stopped, and it stared at the group of people who had jumped out and then at the goblin child. Perhaps it was afraid that its prey had led it into a trap.

“Hey hey, come on boy,” Unlai said, pointing to himself with his thumb. “Want to play? I’ll play with you. Come on.”

The barghest growled, full of menace.

In a natural, flowing motion, Kaijali drew the machete at his waist. The other goblins followed suit.

“No need to think so much. I’ll teach an old dog like you new tricks. How about we start with ‘play dead’?”

“Ashaaaa!”

As a response to the goblins’ taunts, the barghest squeezed the goblin child it was stepping on, and he let out an angry growl.

Although it couldn’t speak, its actions made its intentions clear. *Make a move and I kill the brat.* However—

“Very good! Go ahead and kill him!”

The three goblins ignored the barghest’s taunt, and stepped in with growls of their own.

This unexpected response brought confusion to the eyes of the barghest.

The barghest could not have known that the goblins had not shown up with the intention of saving the goblin child. They were only here because of Enri's wish, and their attitude was "as long as we tried to save him, it's good enough".

Since they had shown themselves for a confrontation, if they didn't kill the barghest their precious Enri might get hurt. Because of that, they needed to finish off the barghest for good. So if the goblin child was murdered, if that wasted their opponent's first action and let them seize the initiative, then the goblins would gladly let the kid die.

Seeing itself reflected in the blades of three machetes, the barghest understood that it could not use its hostage against them and stopped moving. It was confused as to whether or not it should kill the boy it was pinning down.

Taking his life would be easy. It would be gone in one bite. However, if it did that, there was no question that it would be hacked to pieces by its enemies' weapons.

The threat to its life led the barghest to its decision.

Ignoring the goblin child, the barghest leapt at the goblins to meet their attack.

A barghest was heavier than a goblin. The barghest was hoping to pin its foes under itself and finish them off by ripping their throats out with its fangs.

However, this was a poor choice.

The targeted goblin easily twisted out of the way of the attempted attack, and at the same time the other two goblins on the left and right slashed at the barghest with their machetes.

One blade was deflected by the barghest’s chains, but the other ripped into its body, sending blood everywhere.

At the same time, a small hurled vial shattered after hitting the tip of the barghest’s nose.

“Shaaaaa!”

The vile miasma which now clogged its eyes and nose drew an agonized howl from the barghest.

And at that moment, three more jolts of pain ran through its body.

It could sense that it was in trouble from the outflow of blood alone. The barghest wept, its vision shaky and blurred, and made its move. Its target was the one who had thrown the vial — a human.

However, the barghest had only taken a few steps when its feet stuck onto something below and could not move.

Looking down, it saw that the ground was covered a bizarre glue-like liquid. The bizarre liquid was not absorbed by the earth.

“The glue won’t hold it for long! Take it down in one blow!”

In response to the human’s voice, the goblins shouted their battlecries and charged. In addition, the human released a powerful spell from its direction.

“SHAAAAAAAA!!!”

The barghest had used all its strength to try and pull its feet from the ground. Although its movements were slowed because its feet were still coated with adhesive and dirt, it was still able to fight.

Watching the goblins close in for the kill again, the barghest used its superior intellect (compared to a regular beast) to accept the fact that “these goblins were mighty foes”.

It acknowledged that these were different from regular goblins in one crucial way — they were enemies who could kill it.

This barghest knew three methods of attack. Goring, piercing its foe with its horns. Biting, knocking its foe down and raking it with its claws. Unlike stronger barghests, it did not have any special abilities. But in truth, it had an ace in the hole.

This tactic would completely abandon defense, and if the barghest failed, it would be doomed. But now wasn’t the time to worry about holding back. It had to make full use of what could be the last few seconds of its life.

The barghest howled wildly, checking the advance of the enveloping goblins.

“「Reinforce Armor」!”

The spell from behind, cast by the human, made the goblins’ armor glow brightly. The barghest panicked, predicting that it was some sort of enhancement spell, but the goblins in front of it simply grinned.

Maybe it made them reckless, but with their armor reinforced, the goblins advanced as one. Perhaps it might be called a foolish move, but then one could also say it was a brave step forward to quickly end what could be a long battle.

That was what would have happened — if the barghest had not expected them to do this.

If a barghest could change its facial features as easily as a human, it would have smiled to itself.

The chains on its body made the sounds of a snake. Then, the chains binding the barghest suddenly came to life.

The thick and crude shackles began spinning with tremendous force.

The special ability ‘Chain Cyclone’ would severely wound the goblins, if not kill them outright.

The barghest was giving this its all. This was a big move that could only be used once a day, and after the chains were used it would be unable to use them as armor for at least ten seconds. The risk was high.

The unexpected attack threw off the goblins’ dodge by a second. This was a fatal mistake. However—

“Get down!”

A thunderous order cut through the air before the chains could.

The barghest that had bet everything on this attack looked to the other human, who had shouted, and its eyes widened.

The goblins who should have been too late to evade it had nimbly dropped to the ground, as though the voice had injected them with a fresh dose of vitality.

The barghest stared at the commander who stood behind the magic caster.

And then, the barghest’s forelegs and one rear leg were severed from its body. It howled in pain. It tried to recover its chains, bare its fangs, threaten them, but the goblins were having none of that.

“Ani-san, no need for the magic support. For safety’s sake, just put up an alarm around this place.

The barghest, which knew it had already lost, was desperately trying to get away.

Its normally limber body was now cumbersome and slow. That was only natural considering that three of its four legs were now stumps. Even so, the barghest wanted to flee with all its might.

But the goblins thought otherwise.

Sticky blood coated the grass all around and the stench of iron drowned out the odor of the plants.

The goblins looked to the goblin child from where they were standing, bloodstained machetes in hand, knee-deep in the gore and viscera spilling from the corpse of the barghest.

The kid had been hurt badly and had lost the strength to flee, but he still forced his body upright against a tree.

“Hey, who are you guys? Which tribe are you from?”

The goblins looked at each other, wondering how to respond to the questions of a kid who was half frightened and half suspicious.

In each other's’ eyes, they wordlessly discussed the strategy for what kind of attitude would yield the most benefits and what kind of information they should reveal, but Enri felt that there were more pressing matters than that.

“We need to take care of his wounds first. What can we do, Enfi?”

The kid was hurt very badly and he had already lost a lot of blood. Left alone, he would definitely die. Although Enri had no idea how to help him, she was hoping that her childhood friend would know what to do.

“The most normal herbs can do is stop the bleeding, it won’t help against blood loss. However…”

Nfirea began rummaging through his pouch.

“There’s the newly-created healing potion. I wanted to hand it to Gown-san, but… could you show me your wounds?”

Nfirea walked forward, withdrawing the potion vial from his robe.

“W-wait, what’s this dangerous-looking liquid? Is it poison?”

Hostility flashed across the kid’s frightened face as he saw the purple potion. From Enri’s point of view — perhaps even Nfirea’s point of view — this was a natural reaction. The potion looked too much like poison for him to not be on his guard. However, the goblins were very upset by the child’s words, and they immediately stalked over to him.

“—Oi, punk. Ane-san’s the one who decided to save you, along with Ani-san. You’d better watch your words to the people who rescued you. That’s for your own good too, got it?”

The kid turned to look at the blades brandished before him. Although he was only a child, he still knew that it would be a bad idea to anger the goblins in front of him. He sagged visibly, like a puppet whose strings had been cut.

Enri felt that it would be better if they didn’t have to intimidate the kid, but she knew the goblins had their own rules which they followed. It wouldn’t be a good idea for her to butt in with her human sensibilities.

“I-I’m very sorry.”

“Ah, it’s all right. Don’t worry.”

As he answered, Nfirea was smearing the potion on the kid’s body. The wounds were visibly closing up.

“Uuuoooh! What’s this? The color’s so gross but it’s so amazing!”

The kid felt the stares of the surrounding goblins on him and trembled.

“Ah… no, I, ah, th-thank y-you very m-much...”

“Oh, looks like the punk has some manners after all.”

“Very good. This way, I can tell Gown-san that the experiment was completed without a hitch.”

Nfirea looked around, fumbling for approval. Enri and the goblins, who got what he meant, nodded to him.

The potion Nfirea created was made from the materials provided by the great magic caster Ainz Ooal Gown, who was the savior of Carne Village. Not only was there no need to spend money on research fees, but he even provided all the necessary ingredients. With that in mind, the meaning and value of the potion that he had created was plainly obvious.

The fact that Nfirea had decided to use it on his own was a major problem, but perhaps he could pass it off as a practical evaluation of the potion’s effects.

If I explain it to Gown-san after the fact, he'll probably allow it… experimentation is the fundamental principle of pharmacists, anyway.

"You, you used me as a guinea pig!"

Unable to read between the lines, the kid gasped in shock, while Enri and Nfirea grinned in response. A reaction like this was only natural from someone who didn't know the full details of the situation.

Although the two of them had at least managed to smile at the reaction, others present were not so forgiving. The goblins present could not moderate their rage, and spat utterances like, "that little bastard!" and so on.

Enri held out her hands to try and calm them down. This reaction was only natural for a clueless kid, and because he was a kid, it wouldn't do to overreact.

"Well, if Ane-san says so… anyway, we should get moving. Who knows what other monsters will be drawn by the scent of blood."

"And, although we won… Ane-san. Please don't do this sort of thing again, okay? Our job is protecting you."

"What a mess. Still, hearing Enri's voice like that really scared me."

"…Well, it's because of that voice that we're fine — oi, brat, you'd better not run off. We have a lot of questions to ask you and if you don’t want to go home in pieces you’d better answer up truthfully.”

“Unlai-san…”

“—Ane-san, this is for the village’s sake too… get over here, kid.”

The kid got up, slowly and painstakingly. His wounds were healed, so they shouldn’t impede his movement, but his stubborn resistance made his movements slow.

Gokoh, whose machete was dyed red with blood, spat on the ground.

Enri turned to Nfirea for help. However, he silently shook his head. As she turned to look at the goblins, she saw that there was steel in their eyes, and with it, silent approval of their colleague’s actions.

“…Ane-san, don’t worry, I won’t kill him. I just want to ask him some questions about what’s going on. Besides, don’t you think he’ll die if we left him here?”

It seemed as though the question was aimed more at the goblin child than Enri herself. He seemed to get it, and the resistance in his heart faded away.

“I got it… I won’t run off…”

“That’s good. Then we’d better get moving. Kid, can you confirm that there’s only one of those barghests?”

“…I can’t. Apart from them, there’s several ogres too. I don’t know if any of them chased after me. And I’m not a kid, I’m Agu, the fourth son of Ah, the chieftain of the Gigu tribe.”

“Agu-kun, hm.”

“I thought that ‘Kid’ was enough for him…”

“We’ll discuss that later. It’s not like it’s important enough to argue about it now. Since Agu wants us to use his name, maybe we should, in order to build trust between us?”

“Ani-san’s really mature. Then let’s gather our things and go.”

In accordance with Kaijali’s words, the group set off in silence while watching their surroundings warily. The heavy atmosphere that hung around them was almost visible to the naked eye.

Although Enri wanted to lighten the mood with conversation, the forest was not a place for humanity. She could not act lightly here, especially considering that there might be further pursuers after them.

♦♦♦

The tension that had filled their bodies seemed to melt off as they stepped out of the dark, shadowy forest, and was replaced by a gentle, idle feeling. In that moment, they felt that they had finally returned to the world they were used to.

Nfirea, walking beside Enri, sighed in relief with an “Uwah~”. ·

The goblins’ movements had lost their tense edge, but Agu’s expression still looked stiff. He seemed confused by the sunlight and the wide spaces, and it showed on his face. He was a long way from the shadows of the forests where he had grown up.

“There, the village is there.”

Agu’s face scrunched up as he followed Enri’s finger to the distance.

“What? That wall? It feels… feels kind of like that Monument of Destruction.”

“Monument of Destruction?”

“That’s right. It’s a scary new place in the Great Forest. Anyone who goes near it will perish. They say there’s undead there too.”

“You say everyone who goes near it will die, but you sure know a lot about it.”

“…while the Monument of Destruction was still under construction, the brave ones from our tribe went there and saw skeleton monsters building it.”

“Did you know about this?”

“No, I’m sorry, but this is new to us too. If we go too deep into the forest we might meet enemies even our boss can’t defeat. So we try not to go too far.”

“…Hey, which tribe are you three from? You’re stronger than any goblins I’ve ever seen before, so where—”

Agu sneaked a glance at Enri, and then mumbled something about ‘Usually humans are…’ to himself.

“Do you serve the humans?”

“Is that weird? Isn’t it normal to work for someone who’s strong?”

“But strong people… no, I mean, I’ve heard that humans as a race have strong members and weak members… but you’re a woman, right? And the one with his hair covering his face is a man, right?”

Enri got an answer she could accept from Nfirea, who was muttering beside her.

“Enri, I think this child has never seen humans before. At most, he knows what his fellow goblins told him. Also… is it really so hard for goblins to tell us humans apart?”

“Well, our clothes… are different….”

“Like I said, he doesn’t know things like that. Don’t all goblins wear the same thing? Of course, sometimes there’s civilized goblins with a country of their own, but he’s not one of them.”

Enri understood, but as she thought about it, she realised she hadn’t answered Agu’s question yet.

“That’s right, I’m a girl.”

“So are you a magic caster?”

“No, what’s wrong?”

A profoundly disturbed expression appeared on Agu’s face.

“I’m the magic caster. An arcane magic caster.”

“…You two are husband and wife, right?”

“Ehhhh?!”

The two of them exclaimed in perfect harmony.

“No, I mean, in some races, the wives can use their husband’s power and authority… is it not like that?”

“No, no, it’s not like that at all!”

The surrounding goblins seemed to want to say something in response to Enri’s adamant refusal, but all that anyone saw them doing was sagging their shoulders in silence.

“Then… what’s going on? How come that woman’s the strongest?”

“We call you a kid because you don’t understand why. Ane-san’s strength isn’t something that can be seen with the eyes.”

Enri wanted to deny that, but Agu’s earnest eyes looking at her exerted a pressure that left her unable to speak. While Enri was confused, Kaijali asked a question.

“Then, another question for you. Why were you being chased by those guys? What happened?”

“This—”

“…Say, can this wait until we get back to the village?”

And the one who answered Enri’s suggestion with a, “That’s right~ That would be a better idea, -su.”

— A woman who hadn’t been with them all this while.

Everyone exclaimed in surprise, and looked to the source of the sound.

What they saw was a stunning beauty. She was a woman with twin braids and brown skin. She was dressed in what she called her maid wear, and she carried a strange-looking weapon on her back.

She was a suspicious-looking individual, and at the same time a familiar one.

Lupusregina Beta.

She was a maid serving under Ainz Ooal Gown, the savior of Carne Village, and she had been responsible for delivering the alchemical items and apparatuses to the Bareares as well as commanding the stone golems. Her cheerful and carefree attitude made her very popular with the villagers.

However, she had a habit of appearing out of nowhere like she had just now. The villagers believed that it was only natural that a maid in service to a great magic caster should know magic of her own, and Enri had shared that opinion too. Even so, appearing like that all of a sudden was still frightening.

“Lupu-san, w-where did you…?”

“Really now, En-chan, I’ve been following behind you guys from the beginning~su. Strange, didn’t you guys notice? I thought everyone was ignoring me because I had no presence~su”

“Eh? Ehhhh?”

Although she sounded like she was kidding, her tone was very serious. Enri looked around for help from the others.

“Then — Lupu-nee, could you stop playing around?”

“Uwaaaa~ people think I’m just a joker~su. Guys, please remember me~ ahh, I was just kidding anyway~su. Don’t mind, don’t mind~su.”

Silence resumed, until someone sighed tiredly with a “Haaaa.”

“Well, not like there’s anything wrong with that. So who’s this little goblin? …Could, could it be!”

Enri felt the goblins between her and Lupusregina swapping annoyed looks.

“Fufu — Enfi-chan, you got cucked by a goblin? Fufufu.”

While everyone’s eyes went glassy and lifeless, Lupusregina was laughing it up.

“What’s all of this then~su. A pure, innocent boy’s love, trampled just like that~ su. Ah, what a riot~su! Fuha! … All right, enough kidding around, what really happened?”

Agu’s body trembled fiercely, as though he had seen some kind of monster.

Although, Enri could understand why. Lupusregina’s cheerful expression changed ceaselessly, like a high-strung person under stress. As the smile changed, it revealed the true face of Lupusregina beneath, which was horrifying in how far it differed from the her initial expression.

“Aw, don’t worry, I won’t eat you~su. It’s okay-su. C’mon, tell onee-chan all about it~su”

“Lupu-nee. We should talk about this later. Didn’t you agree on that?”

“Oya? Hm, I definitely recall saying something like that~su”

“…”

“…Ah! I hope Beta-san can hand this potion to Gown-sama. It’s newly developed, but its effects have been tested and proven.”

“…Oh? Enfi-chan finally made it?”

“That’s right. Unfortunately, it’s not completely red, but I think we’ve made significant progress.”

“— Well, that’s great. I’m sure Ainz-sama will be very happy to hear it.”

With that, Lupusregina’s attitude seemed to have become that of a normal person, and not the flighty, carefree girl from before. However, that expression only lasted a moment. In the next, she was back to her old self.

“Ahhhh, how exciting— Really, I picked a great day to visit~su. Also, no need to call me Beta. Lupusregina will do -su. Just for you~”

With the (apparently) high-spirited Lupusregina in tow, they entered the village gates.

The villagers didn’t say anything when they saw the unfamiliar goblin child. One could say that they weren’t nervous, but it could also be said that they trusted Enri. She might have become something like family to the goblins who protected the village.

They went through the village and past Enri’s home. Their destination was the goblin’s house.

“Excuse me for a bit. I’m going to call Brita-san over to listen to what Agu has to say.”

“Sounds like a plan, Ani-san. She’s entered the forest while training to be a ranger, so it might be better if she were there to listen to the kid. …So what should we do, Ane-san?”

“Eh? Me?”

Enri panicked briefly, not having expected her name to come up during the conversation. With no particular reason to oppose it, she simply nodded her head.

“Mm. Well, it’s not so much that it’s might be better, but that I hope she hears what he has to say. See you, Enfi.”

With an ‘Understood’, Nfirea left the group behind.

“Although waiting here’s fine… maybe I should make drinks.”

“Great idea~su! I’m thirsty~”

“…Lupu-nee, aren’t you a maid? That means you know how to make delicious drinks, right?”

“Welp, I’m the maid of Ainz-sama, and the other Supreme Beings, soooo... I don’t want to work for anyone else ~su. I just want to laze around su~. Let’s not talk about work and all that other stuff.”

“Is that so… well, that’s a shame.”

Although Unlai and Lupusregina’s conversation seemed quite normal, Enri could still feel a chill run through her.

As they walked and talked, they reached the goblins’ house.

This was a place with a wide courtyard where you could raise and let wolves run around, capable of housing almost twenty people. It was a large building where they could train with and maintain their weapons.

The goblins opened the door, and led the way for Enri and Lupusregina.

“Fueeee- I didn’t know there was a place like this~”

“Hmmm? Lupusregina-san, you’re not coming in?”

“Yup yup~ Can’t go in without an invitation. Well, it’s just a matter of etiquette, it’s not like I can’t really go in. I guess the only other one with such a weird legend is flatchest-san~”

“Flatchest-san…?”

“That’s right, En-chan. It’s the name of a tragic beauty. Well, it wasn’t as though that person couldn’t really go in. Legends, myths folklore — Weeeeeeell, let’s not talk about that any more~ We’re here to listen to what this goblin has to say, right?”

“Ah, yes. Then, drinks… ehm, how about herbal juice and fruit juice? There’s black grass tea and Hyueri water…”

Agu and Lupusregina looked completely baffled by Unlai’s question, so Enri helped explain for them.

“Hyueri are citrus fruits, you cut them open and infuse them into water and it tastes clear and good. Black grass tea is a little bitter.”

“I’ll have a Hyueri water, then.”

“Hyueri juice for me too~”

“Got it. How about Ane-san?”

“I think I’ll have the Hyueri water too. And… how about washing hands? Even if our noses are used to it…”

“Ah, that should be all right. Oi, kid— I mean, Agu, you come over here too. Gotta clean yourself up. And bro, sorry about this, but you mind putting away our dirty weapons?”

“Is it alright?”

“Of course it is. Not like he can do anything. Our rules here are very simple.”

“If that’s the case… let’s go.”

Kaijali left the room with three sets of weapons.

“Agu, come over here quickly.”

“Why do I have to wash? Will it make me pretty?”

Enri noticed that Agu’s hands were very dirty; there weren’t clean by any definition of the word.

“Your opinion is irrelevant. This is the owner of the house telling you to wash up. Or are you saying you’re going to defy the owner in his own house?”

Agu puffed up his cheeks, and plodded over slowly to Enri’s side.

Enri poured the water from the large tank into the pails. After preparing four sets, she stuck her hands into the unexpectedly cold water and started to wash up. The green on her hands melted away like snow in the sun. By the time she was done, she brought her hands in front of her face. The stench was gone.

Enri looked around herself. Gokoh and Unlai were washing their hands too, and the water was dyed red by the barghest's blood.

Next, she looked to Agu, but what she saw left her dumbfounded.

Even a child would know better than to wash up like this. He stuck his arms into the water, waggled them around a little, and that was that. He didn't even dry himself off.

Although Enri had already washed off the plant-scent on her hands, Agu still reeked of torn leaves. For forest goblins, a scent like this was a form of self-defense against magical beasts with keen sense of smell. As such, they might have never developed the habit of washing themselves thoroughly.

Even so—

"You do it like this."

Agu made an annoyed face as Enri tried to teach him. However, he thought of his own position and what the other goblins had said earlier and grudgingly, he started to thoroughly clean himself.

"That's right, you're doing great…"

“Hey, after this, use this to wipe your body. Make sure you get all the blood off.”

Agu didn’t look happy about it, but he still cleaned himself with the damp towel.

“So we just dump the dirty water outside?”

“Yeah, just like that. Ane-san, go have a seat. We’ll take care of the rest.”

With that, Enri headed to the nearby table. It was surrounded by chairs since so many goblins lived here. As she chose a place to sit, she suddenly realized how tired she was. Her arms and legs were like logs, and her head was heavy.

Although part of the reason had been gathering herbs, what had really worn her out was the battle against the barghest.

All I did was watch… Enfi and the goblins were fighting, but they can still be this active… looks like I’m never going to be a warrior… or rather, Enfi’s gotten really strong…

Even though she knew that her childhood friend could use magic, she hadn’t expected that magic to be so powerful.

He's amazing…

As she thought of her suddenly-different childhood friend, Enri's heart swelled with an emotion she couldn't put into words. It seemed to be surprise, but then again it seemed like something else entirely.

A clear sound brought Enri back to her senses, and her eyes fell on the ceramic cups on the table. They were filled with a transparent fluid that gave off a citrus smell, and Enri decided to help herself to a cup.

The cool, sweet and sour taste washed over her entire body, and she felt like she was filled with energy. Agu had sat down beside her at some point, and he gulped his down in one shot and immediately asked for another.

Yet, Lupusregina didn't touch hers.

Come to think of it, I don't think I've ever seen Lupusregina-san eat or drink.

"…Hm? Something wrong? You've been sneaking glances my way recently. Are you in love with me? Ahhhhh, how troubling~ my, how shocking, to think that En-chan is a lesbian~su. Looks like I need to let everyone know~su"

"What— no! No! It's not like that!"

"Wahahahaha~ Just kidding. I know En-chan likes men."

While thinking about how to reply, Enri’s eyes narrowed into a straight line.

“Although, it’s kind of slow… hm? Looks like they’ve arrived.”

Enri turned to the door, but she had the feeling there was nobody outside.

“Really? But I don’t hear anything at all.”

Agu cupped his ear forward with his hand.

“Hey, are humans a race with good hearing?”

“That, that, I don’t know about that, but I don’t think Lupusregina-san would lie about this sort of thing… though she might… prank people a little.”

Then is she lying? Agu thought as he stared wide-eyed at Lupusregina.

“No, really, I heard them. They’re coming for sure. You’re pretty amazing.”

“Hm? Ah, that’s not the case at all. Compared to Enri-san over there, I’m nothing much.”

Agu seemed to swallow it up, and looked back at Enri with a surprised expression.

No, that's not how it is. That smile on Lupusregina-san's face is so damn fake! Enri wondered how she should tell Agu the truth, but before that, a knock came from the door.

Shortly after, Nfirea and a woman in leather armor entered the room.

Brita, the former adventurer, had moved into the village after Nfirea. Originally, she had been an adventurer in E-Rantel, but had retired after certain events. Even so, she still needed to earn a living, and so she responded to the village's solicitations and moved here.

She was studying to be a ranger, and she had potential. Even though she was weaker than Jugem, she was still one of the strongest people in the village and the leader of the village's self-defense force (even though it still wasn't at a level where it could be described as such).

She'd been called along because she was the defense force's leader, and because she had entered the forest while practicing her fieldcraft.

"Ah— it really is a new goblin… no, hm, I keep thinking from an adventurer's point of view… he's not an enemy."

Brita smiled bitterly. It wasn't as though Enri didn't understand where she came from. Going by the stories, goblins were the enemies of mankind. Killing them when you saw them was fine, but this village was different. The hard truth was that humans seemed to be the real enemies in this case.

“Then, since everyone’s here, let’s listen to what he has to say. Agu, can you tell us why you were running while covered in all those wounds?”

“The simple answer is that I was attacked.”

“That’s too simple… what kind of monster attacked you?”

“The minions of the Giant of the East.”

“The Giant of the East? Who’s that?”

“…How do you normally address him?”

“We-we don’t, in the first place, we didn’t even know he existed… Brita-san, do you know?”

The most widely-read person in this place was Nfirea, but when it came to the forest, Brita still knew more than him. Even so, all she could do was shake her head.

“I’m sorry. I haven’t heard anything concerning this Giant of the East.

And I don’t think Master Latimon knows either. We’ve never ventured into the depths of the Forest and don’t know much about its residents.”

“Then, Agu, tell us the basics about him.”

“When you say the basics, you mean…”

Enri understood Agu’s confusion. In situations like these, it was better to ask questions one by one, so it would be easier for him to answer.

“Then, can you tell us about the powerful monsters in the Forest?”

“Well, to me the barghests and the ogres are all strong… but if you want to talk about things on the level of the Giant of the East, then in the forest, there are the powerful ones called the Three Monsters. The first is the Beast of the South. They say he’s an incredible guy who will slaughter everyone who sets foot in his domain. I don’t know what happened to him. Then there’s the Giant of the East. His base is in the withered forest. Finally is the Serpent of the West. I heard it’s a disgusting snake that can use magic.”

“Strange… how about the north?”

“There seems to be a lake in the north with all kinds of races. As for who rules them… I don’t know. But there seem to be twin witches in the swamp. And when the Beast of the South vanished, the forest became weird. I’m not too sure what exactly happened, apparently some really scary guy showed up, and then the balance of power shifted…”

“Is that the Monument of Destruction?”

“That’s right. I also heard that the master of the Monument of Destruction can command the undead, little black shadows that can move through darkness. That’s what the survivors told us.”

Everyone — with the exception of Lupusregina — looked uneasily at each other.

The first thing was the Beast of the South. Since its territory was supposed to be nearby, then it must surely be the magical beast tamed by the adventurers who had escorted Nfirea here — or more specifically, the one who wore jet-black plate armor. It certainly had the look of power and strength about it, and so the description fit it perfectly.

“The Beast… the Wise King of the Forest, Hamsuke-san.”

“That’s it! Ahh, yes, that’s the Beast…”

As he heard Nfirea, Brita, who had not moved to the village at that time, made a sound.

According to her, she had seen it in E-Rantel, from far away.

And there were two more monstrous creatures out there who could equal it. Nobody could not feel shock and fear at that realisation.

“Then, how did you escape?”

“Until recently, the three of them held each other in check. The Beast of the South didn’t leave its territory, but nobody could guarantee that would always be the case. If the East and West fought, no matter who won, there was always the chance that in their moment of victory, they would be finished off by the Beast in their weakened state. As such, none of the three powers actually engaged in battle.”

“All right, I can accept that. However, if the East and West cooperated and… no, the Beast of the South wouldn’t leave his domain, so there’s no need to ally to defeat it. And of course, they can’t make provocative moves…”

“I don’t know what those guys are thinking. They just have their own territory and turned it into their own kingdoms. However, the owner of the Monument of Destruction messed up the power distribution. Because of that, the East and West decided to make war on that king of destruction, and they went on the warpath.”

Agu just kept talking and talking, without a pause.

“He forced us to be his comrades in battle. Though that’s a bad joke. We goblins were worthless to them. They used us up and threw us away, and if we messed up, we suffered. Because of that, we ran away. However…”

“It was useless, right?”

“Yes, that’s right. The barghests and ogres came after us. We couldn’t fight them, so we scattered. I fled in this direction with a few people into the Beast of the South’s territory, but we didn’t expect them to come in after us without hesitation.”

He said there had been a few people, but there had been no sign of anyone other than Agu.

A pained expression drew across Enri’s face, and Gokoh spoke.

“…We have people scouting out the Forest, if anyone’s still alive, we can bring them back here as long as they don’t resist.”

“Yes, there’s that. Wolves’ noses are very sensitive. Then… the question is, besides the barghest, what else is out there? Did they have friends that came over too? If it goes badly, the pursuers might end up coming all the way here. Oi, Agu, what other monsters are there?”

“There’s barghests, ogres, boggarts, bugbears, and some kind of wolf thing…”

“They’re fairly common monsters. I’d like to hear more about the Giant of the East and the Serpent of the West, specifically, their looks, their abilities, that sort of thing. Do you know anything?”

Agu shook his head.

“I don’t know details. Only that the Giant of the East carries a big sword, and the Serpent of the West has a head like you, but what kind of magic he uses, I don’t know.”

Nfirea, the center of everyone’s attention, shook his head. There was simply too little information to work with.”

“The question now is what are we going to do? If something that can fight evenly with the Beast shows up, frankly speaking, we’re done for. The most the self-defence force can do is take the women and children to safety.”

“Indeed. If all we needed was a sturdy defense then it would be fine, or maybe we should think about some other methods. If the disturbance in the forest blew over by itself, it would be great.”

To the people who lived outside the forest, if the matters in the forest settled themselves, they wouldn’t need to move. However, if they were completely unable to enter the forest, that would cause a lot of problems in its own right. In the worst case, they would have to make painful sacrifices to keep going.

"…However, if the enemy can easily take out a forest tribe, that means they must have gathered a lot of fighting power."

"Wrong! …Originally, our tribe was a lot stronger. However, when we went in search of new places to live, our tribe dispatched mixed teams of ogres and adult goblins. If they're still alive, we can still fight back!"

"Then those adult goblins still haven't come back yet?"

As Brita spoke, Nfirea tilted his head, as though thinking about something.

"About that… although this is a completely different topic, could I ask you about something that's bothering me? Do you speak the same way that other goblins do?"

"What do you mean?"

"Ah, you don't know? In the past, I've met goblins myself, and don't take it the wrong way, but they spoke like morons. In the village though, Jugem-san and the others speak normally. The same goes for you — as in you both speak fluently. Because of that, I was wondering if the ones I saw were savage goblin tribes or something."

“No, it’s just that I’m particularly smart for a goblin. Most goblins speak in single syllables. That made conversation in the tribe really troublesome, I can tell you that. I was seriously wondering if I was from another tribe instead. Now, just to be safe, let me ask you this, was I born in a tribe from around here? Have you heard anything about me?”

“No, we don’t know… You kid…Could it be… Ane-san, Ani-san, could you come over here for a bit?”

Nfirea and Enri followed Kaijali to the corner of the room.

“That Agu brat, could it be he’s not a goblin, but a hobgoblin?

Hobgoblins were offshoots of the goblin race, and they were superior to goblins in every way. Goblins were about as big as human children when they were adults, but hobgoblins could reach the height of an adult human.

They were similar to humans in terms of physical abilities and intellect. In order to mate with other goblins, many tribes tended to live in the same region. However, in order not to let the population increase too much, many were left behind as bodyguards or team leaders within the tribe.

“But if my father or mother was a hobgoblin, wouldn’t they know themselves?”

“Both his parents were goblins and he was a hobgoblin.”

“Eh? Isn’t that the kind of weird plot that shows up in dramas?”

“…This is the first time I’ve seen Enri make that kind of expression… but unfortunately, I don’t think that’s the answer. Just as humans adopt children, I think the goblins might have done something similar.”

“That’s certainly possible. Well, in that case, we don’t have to worry too much about it.”

The three of them returned to the table, and as they did, the hitherto silent Lupusregina opened her mouth to speak.

“Welp, made a decision? If anything happens, you can always ask Ainz-sama for help. Ask him to help solve the problem and all that.”

That would be a godsend.

If the hero who saved the village decided to make a move, not even the greatest monsters could hope to stand against him. However—

“That’s too naive.”

Enri mumbled to herself, and the goblins agreed. Only Brita and Agu, who didn’t know of Ainz, were baffled. Nfirea had a complex expression on his face.

“This village is our village. That means we should do as much as we can by ourselves. Although some people will think that I shouldn’t be babbling pretty words since I can’t fight and have no battle experience...”

“No, I agree with Ane-san’s opinion. This village is Ane-san’s—”

“Kaijali?”

“Hm?”

He tilted his head to correct himself.

“Ane-san and us… no, that’s not right either.”

“You’re trying to say that the village belongs to everyone who lives here, right?”

“That’s right, Ani-san. You’re getting it! Well, even so, I think borrowing the power of that magic caster-sama should wait until we’re completely out of options.”

“But if we do that, everyone might die~su… Getting hacked up hurts, you know~su”

“Ha! Lupusregina-san, we won’t let that happen. We’ll sacrifice ourselves so everyone has time to run first.”

A disappointed look appeared on Lupusregina’s face.

“Is that so? You’d better work hard, then~su.”

“And I also want to communicate our village’s intentions to the Adventurer’s Guild in E-Rantel — or maybe “report” would be a better word to use. If the guild accepts our request, they’ll send a member to come and assess the current situation. It would be troublesome if we put in a request after it becomes an emergency.”

Brita followed on after Nfirea’s suggestion.

“That’s true. The Adventurer’s Guild doesn’t want to be surprised by unexpected monsters. Although workers and their ilk might say otherwise, the words of people blinded by greed aren’t worth mentioning. It’s only natural that an organization would want to protect their own members.”

“Brita-san, although I don’t want to speak ill of adventurers, but during emergencies, the request payments will go through the roof, what happens if they refuse even then?”

“Adventurers don’t want to die, and the Guild won’t let them either. Because of that, when it comes to emergency requests, the prices will go up, which means that the Guild will tend to assign higher-ranked adventurers to deal with them, even if the situation technically doesn’t warrant them. “

All Enri could do when hearing the former adventurer’s words was to accept them. It was quite hard to have to accept this when they were being pushed into a corner. However, when she looked at it from the adventurers’ point of view, it made sense.

“Well, even if the Guild checks it out, people might still die anyway, that sort of thing happens a lot…”

Brita bit her lip.

“— When I think of that vampire attack, I can’t help but shiver… used to be I couldn’t even sleep without medicine for it…”

“Vampire? What’s that?”

Agu asked without thinking, and Brita smiled bitterly.

“It’s a secret. Well, it’s more like I don’t even want to think about it. You’ll piss yourself.”

“But I was the one who was aski—”

“You’re not in a position to ask questions, brat.”

“Then we’ll go ahead with his plan for the time being and report it to the Guild, and make a request if all goes well, is that it? Although request fees won’t be cheap, we’ll need to break the bank for this one. Tell Jugem-san and the chief about it later. Can you do that, Enri?”

“I’ll take care of the self-defence force. Honestly speaking, I was thinking this was the way to go too.”

Nfirea nodded as Brita spoke.

“Then, I guess I’ll be leaving the village for a bit su~ You really won’t ask Ainz-sama for help?”

“Yes. We’d like to do as much as possible by ourselves. If possible, we’d like you to tell Gown-sama that much.”

“Got it su~”

As Agu looked at Enri and Nfirea, who were moving off, a hard-to-describe feeling welled up within him.

“Just what’s so great about that woman?”

“Hah?!”

There was danger in the adult goblin’s voice, and it made Agu’s body tremble.

Agu felt that the adult goblins were stronger than anyone else in his village. It was only natural for him to break out in goosebumps when threatened by them.

Yet, this still could not overcome his childish curiosity.

“Are women really that great in this Carne tribe?”

From Agu’s point of view, Enri didn’t seem particularly strong. Although she had some muscle on her arms and legs, it wasn’t enough at all. While she didn’t need to be as big as an ogre, but if she were a superior, she needed way more than that.

If she were a magic caster he could understand it. The female leaders of the goblin tribes often used that mysterious power. However, that woman didn’t look like a magic caster.

Frankly speaking, Agu didn’t understand why Enri was placed above the goblins.

“It’s not like that.”

“Is that hunter woman that came later very strong?”

“Well, now. Brita’s not bad in her own way. But we’re better.”

Agu’s opinion of the grown goblin in front of him went up another notch. Although he was still short, Agu had the feeling that there was good reason for his confidence.

“And then, that woman who appeared from behind you, she’s not strong, is she? Scared me to death.”

The adult goblin suddenly clammed up, and stared at Agu.

Unsure of what he was feeling inside, Agu nervously asked his question.

“W-what? What’s with that woman?”

“That woman who suddenly appeared… her name is Lupusregina, and she… she’s very dangerous. If you want to live in this village, do not *ever* go near her or speak to her. It’s for your own good.”

“Ah. Ahhhh. I get it.”

“And I have to say this up front. Although it should be blindingly obvious, if you do anything to the people in the village… let’s be honest here, you won’t just get away with a scolding, you’d better be prepared to die.”

“I, I got it. So that’s like with a defeated tribe, right? I promise that I will not harm anyone from Carne Tribe.”

“All right, that’s good… stay away from Lupusregina, okay?”

Agu understood the mix of caution and dread in the adult goblin’s heart, and he engraved the warning into his heart. With that done, he realised he hadn’t gotten an answer to his first question, and he asked again.

“Why is Enri-san so great?”

Agu had learned to behave. Or rather, it was easy for him to learn, since he was the smartest in the tribe and couldn’t talk much with other goblins.

“Ha. …Enri… honestly speaking, she’s very strong.”

“Eh?!”

“It’s because you’re too weak that you can’t tell. if Ane-san got serious, she could take care of a barghest or whatnot with just one hand, and squeeze the blood out into a cup to drink. You know?”

“Really?!”

“Oh yes, yes, of course it’s true.”

Agu thought of Enri. Looking at it calmly, she’d been able to give forceful, effective orders. Maybe that was just the tip of the iceberg?

“Ane-san just pretends to be weak. If she hears anything funny about you, she’ll crush you to death with one hand. After that, cleanup will be a pain. There’ll be blood everywhere.”

“Is, is that so… then why, why does she have to pretend to be weak? If she were strong, wouldn’t there be fewer problems?”

“If you show off your strength, some fool will immediately come and challenge you. Won’t that cause its fair share of trouble as well?”

Agu had thought that strength was the solution to all problems, but that was not the case.

Locked in a labyrinth of self-reflection, he didn’t realise that the adult goblin in front of him had a playful expression on his face.

♦ ♦ ♦

In the middle of the night, Enri suddenly woke from sleep. Though there didn’t seem to be anything around, Enri remained still while she moved her eyes to check around her. The world before her was pitch black, lit only by a slim ray of moonlight from between the window shutters. She couldn’t see anything strange in this weak light.

But Enri's ears could hear just fine.

There were no sounds of horses neighing, armored knights clanking, or people screaming. It was just a normal night.

Enri sighed softly, and closed her eyes. She'd been fast asleep, so she was still groggy and couldn't get up right away.

A lot had happened today. After the talk with Agu, she had gone to explain things to the village chief and Jugem, who had returned from his scouting.

It'll be all right, right?

In order to confirm the new information, Jugem had gone into the forest again and they had left at night. Moving at night in the forest was just too dangerous. Goblins were different from humans; they could see with small amounts of light, so they could move freely. However, there were many nocturnal magical beasts and monsters, and they would become active after the sun set.

It was much more dangerous than in the day.

If there hadn't been the need to confirm that there were no more monsters chasing Agu, Jugem would never have set out.

It was true that the goblins were strong, but that was only in comparison to Enri. Like the Beast, many creatures in the forest were stronger than the goblins.

A sense of dread and loss fell over Enri, making her twitch, and because of that, her little sister moaned in her sleep, scooting closer to Enri’s body.

Enri half-opened her eyes, and peeked at her little sister.

Looks like it hadn’t woken her up. She could even hear her gentle snoring.

Hehe…

Just as Enri chuckled in her throat, the sound of soft knocking resounded on the door. This was definitely not a trick of the wind.

Enri frowned. What could there be so late at night? Then again, it was precisely because it was so late at night that meant it had to be important.

She gingerly separated herself from Nemu and the blanket and slowly got off the bed, moving carefully so as not to wake her little sister.

The boards creaked as she got out of bed, making Enri’s heart beat faster as she worried about waking Nemu.

After that incident, Nemu had to sleep with Enri at night, so severe was the trauma she suffered.

Enri had no intention of scolding her for it. If pressed for the reason why, it would be because Enri felt safer when she slept with her sister.

But she knew, even when the two of them were together, Nemu would sometimes be awoken by her nightmares. Because of that, Enri insisted on being with Nemu even when she was sound asleep.

Quietly, and therefore slowly, she inched toward the threshold, but the knocking didn't stop.

Enri nervously peeked out the window, and Jugem's silhouette was illuminated by the moonlight. She sighed in relief.

In order not to wake Nemu, Enri quietly spoke outside the window.

"Jugem-san, you're safe."

"Yeah, Ane-san. In the end, it was all right. I'm sorry I woke you up, but some things I think you should know early."

Enri opened the door slightly, and squeezed her body out through the gap. She was worried that the moonlight coming in would wake Nemu. Understanding from her movements, Jugem lowered his voice and spoke.

“There’s something we need Ane-san for.”

“Now?” Enri smiled.”Of course.”

“I’m really sorry about this.”

Enri followed in Jugem’s footsteps while telling him not to apologize. It might have been better for Nemu to be awake for this, and she’d considered it, but Jugem had come for her knowing that everyone else was asleep. There had to be a reason for it.

“I’ll explain as we move along.”

Maybe he was more tired than usual, but this was work — after Jugem made up his mind, his words took on an edge.

Although Enri felt that it was okay to be more casual with a simple village girl like herself, Jugem had never let himself relax up till now, so Enri gave up on that idea.

“Firstly, we found some members of Agu’s tribe.”

“That’s wonderful!”

“…but they’re emotionally fragile, and I think they’ll need to rest for a few days. We’ll need to borrow Ani-san for this.”

Sensing Enri’s surprised expression, Jugem followed up with an explanation.

“When we found the survivors of Agu’s tribe, they were being held by the Giant of the East’s ogres, and used as food. Although Cona healed the wounds of their bodies, their minds are still scarred. Ani-san has some medicine to calm them down, and we want him to help treat them. After that, there’s a somewhat more troublesome matter.”

Jugem watched Enri’s expression before continuing.

“When we rescued them, we captured five ogres. Although we only did it to question them… it seems ogres normally coexist with goblins, and while the ogres fight, the goblins provide food, shelter, and so on, in a mutually beneficial relationship. Because of that, they said they’re willing to fight for our tribe. According to Agu, this isn’t uncommon… so, what should we do?”

“Can we trust them?”

“Agu says we can. The ogres won’t fight for anyone apart from the goblins of their tribe, they betrayed the Giant of the East because he wasn’t of their tribe. It’s something like that.”

“Mm. But, ogres sound kind of scary…”

“Once they accept the people in the village as part of their tribe, all you need to do is feed them and it’ll be fine. You can give them just about any kind of food too. The ogres’ tendency to eat anything is quite helpful here.”

Honestly speaking, this decision was very difficult for a simple village girl to make.

“How about killing them?”

This was delivered in a casual tone.

“Frankly speaking, I have no problems with killing them outright. It would save us a big stack of problems. In the first place, people like them who betray others might turn on us if things start to go bad. Agu says they won’t, but blindly believing everything a kid says is a little…”

“And what do you think, Jugem-san?”

“If they could fight for us, it would be great. We don’t know how many pursuers might come from the forest, so a few extra meat shields would help a lot.”

“Then, one more question, will they eat people?”

“…Ane-san. Although ogres have a reputation for eating humans, they’re just monsters who eat meat. The only thing is that it’s easier to catch humans to eat than wild animals.”

For ogres, it was better to catch humans than say, rabbits. It was only natural when you considered humans were easier to capture and gave more meat too.

“Well, if you give them something to eat, they won’t attack the villagers. In the first place, they only attack people to fill their stomachs. You have my word that we’ll hunt enough animals to fill their bellies. Of course, they’ll still need to be supervised and we’ll have to see how things go. I promise we won’t let anyone in the village be hurt.”

“…In that case, it would be good if we could trust them enough to make them subordinates. Not just for now, but for the future as well.”

“I’m glad you understand. Only thing is, there’s a small difference with what I said earlier. If they fail next time, we’ll wipe them out. Truthfully speaking, I’ve been thinking of how to impress on those ogres that Ane-san is the strongest.”

“Eh?!”

Enri let out a noise that sounded like she’d been flipped turned upside down. This was too much of a leap for her. Why did a simple village girl like herself have to become the leader of a band of ogres?

Wouldn’t it be enough if Jugem was their boss?

“This is planning for the future. It’ll be troublesome if the ogres think of Ane-san as just another human being. Although we listen to you, the ogres won’t listen to anyone except us, and that’s potentially very dangerous. If anything happens to us at the frontline, I hope that there’ll be someone in the rear who can command the ogres.”

Enri racked her village girl head as she pondered the problem.

“Which means you need two people who can command them?”

Jugem nodded.

“In that case, Enfi could—”

“Ani-san might end up being on the frontline too.”

“I see…”

Enri understood, and nodded. Someone in a safe place like herself ought to be useful too. That was what Enri wanted as well. However—

“But… can I control the ogres?”

“That’s what we’re about to do, Ane-san. How good are you at acting?”

♦♦♦

Jugem brought them to the village gate and then to a side door. Beyond it were five ogres kneeling on the ground. They were also the source of the stench that had been hanging in the air.

Surrounding them were the goblin troops, all of whom were present and unhurt.

On one side of the door was an observation platform, which would normally have been manned by villagers or goblins, but not now. The goblins had temporarily left it.

Nfirea was there too, along with the somewhat distant Agu.

“Yo, Enri. Nice night?”

“Yeah, Enfi. The moon’s really pretty.”

“Indeed. It’s so clear.”

“Well, excuse the interruption. We’re a little early, but let’s begin.”

Jugem yelled out as he heard Enri’s words.

“Oi! You lot! Our Ane-san is here! She holds your lives in her hands!”

When the five ogres heard this, they raised their heads to look at Enri. It felt like there was a palpable pressure crushing her, but Enri forced herself not to take a step backward. If she gave in, the plan would fail, and the goblins would nip potential problems in the bud by killing the ogres on the spot.

Enri could already see the goblins’ hands going to their weapons. Enfi was calmly taking out a potion bottle himself.

An eternity seemed to pass under the withering pressure.

Enri endured the stares of the ogres and returned it with one of her own. Her gaze was steady and unyielding.

In her eyes, the ogres overlapped with the image of the knights from back then.

Enri clenched her fists, recalling the violent urges she had back then, of wanting to rip off the knight’s helmet so she could beat him to death with it.

Don’t look down on me. Everyone else guards the village, so I have to protect this place too!

After a second — a second which seemed to stretch out forever to Enri — the ogres wavered.

They peeked at each other, and then at Jugem.

“Told you, didn’t I. Our boss is the strongest.”

“Faces down, all of you!”

Enri shouted out just as Jugem finished.

The forcefulness of Enri’s voice surprised even herself, and Agu at the edge of her vision twitched violently, but that was fine. What was important was that the ogres had lowered their heads to her.

For the time being, the ogres had acknowledged Enri’s superiority.

“Well then, what do you have to say to our boss, the chief of Carne Village, our Ane-san?”

With their heads still lowered, what emerged from the ogres was a torrent of confused voices.

“So, so scary, little boss. Forgive.”

“Sorry, we attacked your tribe. Please forgive.”

By “your tribe”, the ogres probably meant Agu’s tribe. Though the reality was somewhat different, it was easier for them to understand the situation as Agu’s people being part of Carne Tribe, in order to avoid overloading the ogres’ brains.

“We will, work for you.”

“That’s right! Work for me and my tribe!”

That last statement was made with the dregs of her spirit she could muster. Although she’d only said two or three sentences, Enri was already very tired. It was as bad as the encounter with the barghest.

Just as Enri was about to drop out of Boss Mode from fatigue, Jugem helped her out.

“Wonderful! Looks like Ane-san saved your lives!”

The strength had visibly ebbed from the ogres’ bodies. Given that they could be killed at any moment, that was a natural reaction.

One ogre looked at Enri and spoke.

“Boss, Chief, we, what do?”

That, she hadn’t thought about. Still, what she didn’t know, she could entrust to someone else.

“Jugem, I’ll let you take care of them. Use them as you see fit.”

“Got it, Ane-san.”

The goblin leader bowed to Enri, then turned back to the ogres.

“Well then. First of all, we’re going to pitch tents outside the village. You lot will be shacking up there. And you too, help them with the tents.”

The ogres left, accompanied by the goblins.

“Pitching tents outside the village will be a problem; we’ll need to find them a place to live in the village. Even so, we need to wait till they learn not to attack the villagers first.”

“I’ll need to go around to talk with a lot of people to make them accept it.”

“Yup. Although, I think as long as you’re the one doing it, it’ll be fine. And, about tomorrow…”

According to the plan, Enri and Nfirea would be setting out to E-Rantel, with several goblins as guards.

“I’m sorry. I still need to help treat the survivors from Agu’s tribe, so I can’t go.”

After all, they would be living in the same village as the same ogres who wanted to eat them. The mental trauma had to be treated along with their physical wounds, and Lizzie’s personality would only frighten them and have the opposite effect. In the end, there was nobody better for this than Nfirea.

“Really? I don’t feel so good about this…”

Enri didn’t have any experience with visiting a big city like E-Rantel, so from her point of view the burden seemed quite weighty.

“Then, how about getting the village chief to go with you?”

“I think that could be difficult…”

The chief would be busy whipping the village into shape, and helping out the newcomers to the village, so he wouldn’t be able to travel abroad.

“…How about the chief’s wife?”

“Mm. Well, frankly speaking, there’s not enough hands in the village. It used to be that way and now it’s even more so.”

Carne Village was a village with a very small population. As a result, when their numbers decreased, their ability to do anything decreased with it. This was why the villagers had suppressed their opposition to inviting more residents to stay with them.

“When I go to E-Rantel, I need to go to the shrine and confirm if there’s anyone who wants to move to the village… Really, this is too much for a village girl to be doing…”

“All the best, Chief.”

Enri pouted as she heard Jugem’s words. Part of her was thinking, “The nerve of you”. After all, they were one of the reasons why Enri was so busy.

“I really wanted to come along…”

Nfirea mumbled in a depressed tone, and then covered it up in a flustered flurry of desperate handwaving.

“I-it’ll be fine, I’ll take care of Nemu-chan. So you can go without worries.”

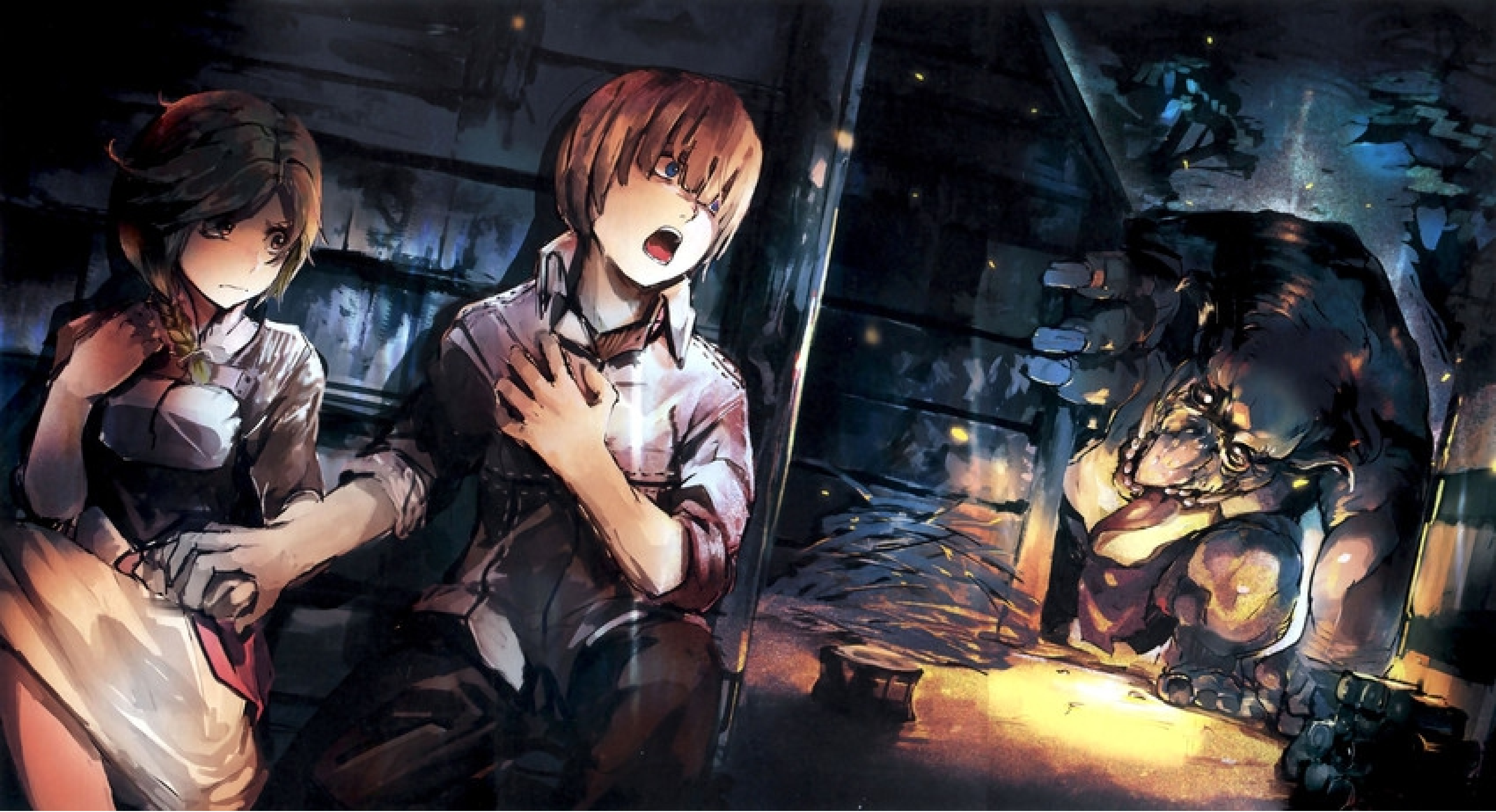
“…All right, I get it, am I the only one in the world who has to go through this? One moment people worship me and make me out to be someone great, the next I have to go somewhere I’ve never been to before and do things I’ve never done before…”

“Don’t be so pessimistic, Enri. There’s got to be someone out there who can relate to you.”

Enri smiled weakly to Nfirea and Jugem as her shoulders drooped, a sign she was losing the battle with fatigue. In the distance, Agu watched from the distance, muttering to himself.

“So it was true, she took control of the goblins by force… the Chief of Carne Village, Enri-nee…”

Side 1 (2/2)



Part 3

The fortress city E-Rantel was dominated by three concentric rings of fortified walls. The doors on these walls were some of the sturdiest and strongest parts of the walls themselves, and they seemed to radiate a sense of solidness.

It was a common sight to see travellers on the street staring open-mouthed at the city that was said to be able to repulse any invasion the Empire made. And the people on the streets had surely made similar expressions in the past.

Besides these gates were customs inspection posts, manned by several soldiers who were relaxing just out of the direct sunlight.

Although some people might question whether it was all right for the soldiers of a city near the frontline to be so relaxed, the truth was that the troops at the inspection posts were there to vet travellers. Their job was to uncover contraband and spies from other countries, so they had nothing to do when nobody was entering the city.

As a result, the currently idle soldiers — though they maintained discipline instead of passing their time by playing cards — couldn’t resist the urge to yawn.

They might look slack now, but when they were busy, they were extremely so. It was especially hard to describe the mornings in words, when the city had just opened its gates.

With the sun at its highest point in the sky, the travellers began appearing on the streets in small groups, scattered sparsely among the other pedestrians. It was only natural that people would travel in numbers, given that this was a world inhabited by monsters.

When they show up, they show up in force; we're going to be busy soon, thought the guard who was idly contemplating the streets from his counter. His eyes rested on a wagon about to enter the street, waiting for some pedestrians to pass.

A woman was driving it. He couldn't see anyone else on the uncovered wagon bed. She was travelling alone.

He couldn't see any weapons on her either. His first guess was that she was some village girl.

As the soldier thought this, he tilted his head as he second-guessed himself.

It wasn't anything rare to have people from the nearby villages coming here. However, a woman travelling by herself was a different matter entirely. The area surrounding E-Rantel wasn't completely free of bandits and monsters. Thanks to the efforts of the legendary adventurer team "Darkness", most of the dangerous monsters and bandits had been wiped out. But "most" didn't mean "all", and there were still mundane beasts like wolves and the like to look out for.

This wasn't unique to E-Rantel; it applied to all of the other cities as well. And come to think of it, could women travel by themselves?

While the thought that she might have just outrun the bandits came to mind, he didn't sense any tension or nervousness from her at all. It was as though she knew the journey was a safe one.

What kind of woman was she?

The soldier shifted his now-suspicious gaze to her horse, and that was when he did a double-take.

The horse was exceptional, not something a mere village girl would have. Its condition and coat reminded him of a warhorse.

Warhorses were extremely valuable. Even if you could actually raise the money to buy one, a normal person wouldn’t be able to get one easily. Leaving aside monstrous riding animals like wyverns and griffins, warhorses were some of the mightiest creatures which could serve as mounts.

A normal person would need money and connections to obtain such a warhorse, and a simple village girl wouldn’t have those connections.

It was also possible that she had stolen the horse from its original owner, but anyone who stole such a valuable item would be hotly pursued and targeted for retribution. This was why bandits wouldn’t steal horses or attack mounted soldiers.

In short, after considering all the visible evidence, the chances that she really was a simple village girl were very low. So what was this creature posing as a village girl?

The important thing was that she was travelling alone. That meant she was very confident in her abilities, and those abilities were not limited by the fact that she chose to dress as a village girl. With that in mind, it was likely that she was a magic caster, since their equipment and power rarely matched their appearance.

That was an answer he could accept. If pressed for the reason, it was because magic casters, or adventurers in general, were wealthy and connected, so obtaining a warhorse would be easy.

“Is that a magic caster?”

His partner beside him went through the same thought process.

“Might be.”

The soldier furrowed his brow and answered.

Magic casters were very irritating people to check and clear.

To begin with, their primary weapon, magic, was a thing that didn’t exist in a form that was visible to the naked eye. Which meant it was impossible to see what they were armed with.

Secondly, they might use dangerous items as part of their magic and finding those was hard.

Thirdly, magic casters usually had a lot of baggage, so checking them all was troublesome.

Honestly speaking, he hated dealing with them. Because of that, they’d hired a man from the Magician’s Association — after paying a suitable fee, of course — to help them out. However…

“Do we have to bring that guy out? I don’t want to.”

“It can’t be helped. If anything happens, it’s our asses.”

“It would be nice if she’d just dressed like a magic caster to begin with.”

“Carrying a weird staff, wearing a weird robe?”

“Yup. At least you’d know she was a magic caster. Then we’d forcibly enlist her into the Magician’s Association and make her carry the obligatory Adventurer’s Guild identification seal.”

The two soldiers got up as one, laughing to each other. This was to welcome the girl who might be a magic caster.

Under the watchful eyes of the soldiers, the wagon rolled up to the door and stopped.

The girl disembarked. Her forehead was slick with sweat, but she seemed used to travelling under the sun. Her sleeves were long, probably to ward off sunburn. Her clothes didn’t seem expensive or well-tailored. No matter how you looked at her, she was a simple village girl.

But you couldn’t judge a book by its cover. She could be hiding something. Their job was to find out what that was.

The soldiers warily approached the girl.

They spoke to her with kind and gentle tones. Something along the lines of, “We don’t want to spook you, so please calm down and relax.”

“Yes. No problem.”

The soldiers escorted the girl to the checkpoint.

In order to protect against the use of ‘Charm’ spells, two more soldiers followed at a distance of several meters. The others watched her carefully, wary of any suspicious movements.

The girl tilted her head several times, as though sensing the tension in the air.

“…What’s wrong?”

“Eh? Ah, no, nothing’s wrong.”

Someone who could notice the minute changes in the air couldn’t possibly be normal. The guards brought her into the checkpoint with that in mind.

“Then, could you sit down there?”

“Yes.”

The girl sat in one of the chairs provided in the small blockhouse.

“Let’s start with your name and origin.”

“Yes. My name is Enri Emmot. I come from Carne Village, near the Great Forest of Tob.”

The soldiers exchanged looks, and one of them stepped out of the blockhouse. He was going to check the register for any matching records.

In order to manage its residents, the Kingdom kept records of them in the form of registers. That being said, the registers were crude affairs, and the relevant details of birth and death were update very slowly, if at all. At a very conservative estimate, there were tens of thousands of mistakes in them. As a result, relying too heavily on the registers would be a bad idea, but even so, they had their uses.

This register was muddled, but it had a lot of entries, so searching it would take a long time. The soldiers understood this, and decided to try and take care of something else in the meantime.

“Then, in place of the toll, could I see your permit?”

Normally speaking, everyone who used the Kingdom’s roads had to pay a toll — something like a passage tax. However, charging residents this money would cause trade to grind to a halt, and as a result every village was issued travel permits with which they could enter the city free of charge. Of course, as there were different nobles in each region, there were different rules for each region too.

“Hmmm, let me see… here it is.”

The soldier stopped Enri from opening her bag to search it.

“Ah, we’ll do that. Could you give us your bag?”

Enri handed it over without protest. The soldiers carefully searched the insides, and found a parchment.

They unrolled it on the table so everyone could see. Although the literacy rate amongst Kingdom citizens was very low, it was a given that every soldier stationed at a checkpoint could read and write. Or rather, they were here precisely because they were literate.

“I see. Well, it looks all right. This is definitely the permit issued to

Carne Village. I have confirmed this.”

The soldier rolled the parchment back up and returned it to the bag.

“Next, state the reason why you’re coming to E-Rantel.”

“Yes. Firstly, I’m here to sell the medicinal herbs that we’ve picked.”

The soldiers looked outside at the wagon, whose urns were currently being searched.

“And what are the herbs you’re selling?”

“Four urns of Nyukuri, four urns of Ajina and six urns of Enkaishi.”

“Six urns of Enkaishi, you say?”

“That’s right.”

Enri was proud of this, and it showed on her face. The soldier understood why.

After all, when manning a checkpoint, one eventually picked up a working knowledge of medicinal herbs.

Enkaishi only flowered for a very short time and could only be gathered during that time, but it was a major ingredient in healing potions. The demand was very high, and thus the price was always good. If she had six urns like she said, that meant that she would have a lot of money when she sold them off.

“Then, where do you plan to sell them?”

“I was planning to sell them at the former residence of Madam Bareare.”

“Bareare? You mean the pharmacist Lizzie Bareare?”

Although she didn’t live there any more, she had been the most important person in E-Rantel’s pharmaceutical business until recently. If she was selling the herbs at Lizzie’s place, that meant Lizzie trusted her very much.

Then, there’s no need to pry deeper, the soldiers thought.

The truth was that although their job was to stop dangerous things from entering the city, investigating these things once they entered the city was no longer their problem.

The soldier nodded with a grunt, and watched Enri’s expression.

Up till now, their conversation hadn’t been suspicious, and he didn’t feel that she was lying.

Which meant that after the cargo inspection was complete, his job would be over.

At this moment, the soldier who had just returned nodded his head.

That was to say, a girl called Enri was recorded in the register.

However, that record simply said that there was a girl called Enri born in Carne Village. Without any guarantee that the person in front of them was the real Enri, there was also no proof of the kind of life Enri had led. Perhaps during her travels, she had acquired some powerful magic, or she had died in her journey and some criminal was using her name.

Because of that, one final check was needed.

“Understood. Then, call that man here.”

The soldier nodded, and left the blockhouse.

“After this, we will be examining your body. Is that alright?”

“Eh?”

A surprised expression dawned on Enri’s face. The soldier hurried to qualify his words.

“And, there won’t be any other questions. I’m sorry, these are the rules. And we won’t do anything weird to you, so don’t worry.”

“…I understand.”

Seeing that Enri was okay with it, the soldier sighed with relief. He didn’t want to be the one who angered a possible magic caster.

The soldier who left returned once more, this time with a man trailing behind him.

This man was a magic caster.

His nose protruded like an eagle’s beak, while his thin face was sallow and pale. His body was wrapped in a black robe that looked very hot. His sweat flowed freely, and his hands which resembled claws clutched his curved staff tightly.

If the soldier had his say, he would have gotten rid of that robe if it was so hot, but the magic caster personally liked that style, and stubbornly refused to change his clothes. As such, when the magic caster entered the room, the temperature seemed to rise by a few degrees.

“So it’s this girl, then?”

The magic caster spoke calmly, which his soldier escort found strange, as usual.

Although he seemed to be a man in his twenties, his extremely hoarse voice made it impossible to determine how old he was by his voice alone. Was it that his appearance was abnormally young, or that his voice was abnormally hoarse?

“That…”

Enri turned a surprised look at the magic caster who had replaced the soldier. In his heart, the soldier thought that her surprise was inevitable. He too, had been frightened the first time he saw the man.

“This is a magic caster from the Magician’s Association. He’s going to perform a simple check, so please wait.”

The soldier gestured to Enri to remain seated, and then nodded to the magic caster.

“I’ll leave this to you, then?”

“Of course.”

The magic caster took a step toward Enri, and then he cast his spell.

“「Detect Magic」.”

After that, the magic caster squinted his eyes, like a beast sizing up its prey. Yet, Enri remained calm in the face of this strange sight.

Seeing that, all the soldiers could think was “No wonder”.

Someone who could remain calm under such a mighty gaze could not be a simple village girl. At least, if she hadn’t had experience confronting monsters or people who wanted to kill her, there was no way she could have borne that pressure. In the soldier’s mind, that just cemented his suspicions.

“Don’t try and deceive my eyes. You’re hiding a magic item. It’s on your waist.”

Enri heard it, and looked to her waist in surprise, for the first time since she came here.

The soldiers took up a stance. They understood weapons like swords, but magic items were a mystery to them.

“You mean this?”

Enri produced a small horn from her clothing, small enough that both her hands could hide it. The soldiers couldn’t overlook this.

“…Is that a magic item?”

“That’s right. You’ve been deceived by her appearance. That thing is imbued with powerful magic.”

The soldiers were speechless. If this was an item the magic caster considered powerful, then how mighty was it?

As the soldiers considered that this girl must have dressed plainly for a reason, they couldn’t help but feel a piercing chill through their chests.

“Ah, this is—”

“No need for excuses. My magic has already seen through it.”

In order to shut Enri up, he cast another spell.

“「Appraise Magic Item」 — uoooooooh!”

The magic caster’s facial expressions changed several times in as many seconds. They went from shock, fear, terror, and then confusion.

“What, what, what is this? Like a sea of power with no shore… Impossible! What on earth is this?!”

The magic caster’s face was red, and flecks of spittle flew from the sides of his mouth.

“You, you, what the devil are you! Don’t try to trick me!”

The magic caster’s dramatic attitude shift took the soldiers by surprise, and Enri was no exception as her eyes widened.

“No, I’m just, I’m just a normal person! A simple village girl! Really!”

“A village girl? You, why are you lying? Then how could you have obtained a magic item like this? If you really are a simple village girl, how could you have gotten something like that?!”

“Eh? This, this is a gift from the one who saved our village, Ainz Ooal Gown-sama—”

“Lies again! A priest from the Theocracy must have given it to you!”

“Eh? What’s that about the Theocracy?”

“Men! Assemble! This girl is just too suspicious!”

Although the soldiers didn’t understand what was going on, up till today, they had never seen the magic caster freak out like this before. So if this were an emergency, they should drop whatever they were doing and respond to the summons.

“Fall in! Fall in!”

In response to the soldier’s shouts, several of their comrades stopped their cargo inspection and entered the room.

“Who gave you an item like this? How did you get it? You can’t possibly be a simple village girl!”

“No, this really was given to me by Gown-sama! Please, you have to believe me!”

Two of the soldiers exchanged looks. All of them, as well as their assigned magic caster, believed that Enri was a magic caster as well. However, given Enri’s nervous reaction to the sudden change in the situation, they could not help but think she was a normal girl.

“What, what else is there? Tell me why you think she’s suspicious!”

“Hnh! To begin with, this horn can summon a group of goblins — although I’m not sure how many it can call up, but it can do such a thing.”

The soldiers frowned. It would be troublesome if something like that was used on the streets. However, was that so bad? Certain people, such as adventurers, possessed a plethora of magic items. Just because this one could summon goblins wasn’t too unusual in itself.

“And this so-called village girl’s testimony is riddled with inconsistencies. That item is worth several thousand gold coins; why would anyone just give it to a mere village girl?”

“Several thousand?!”

“Several thousand?!”

This unbelievable sum drew cries of disbelief from the soldiers, and Enri herself.

Several thousand gold coins was a sum no normal person could earn in their entire life. It was hard to believe such a simple-looking item could be worth so much.

“That’s right. Nobody would hand out such an item without a good reason, let alone to a mundane girl! I could accept it if she were a top-class adventurer or magic caster. But she says she’s just a village girl! It’s far too suspicious!”

That much the soldiers understood. Exceptional people would tend to gather exceptional items to themselves. In the past, both the great men of good and evil persuasions were known for their acquisition of powerful equipment. It was their destiny, and it was inevitable.

“No, really, I’m just a simple village girl…”

“And, I’ve never heard of any Ainz Ooal Gown fellow. At least, he’s not part of our Association, nor have I ever heard of an adventurer by that name.”

“The Warrior-Captain knows Gown-sama!”

“The Kingdom’s Warrior-Captain, Gazef Stronoff-dono? …You must be uttering nonsense. How would a simple village girl know of such things?”

“Because he came to our village! It’s true! Go ask him and you’ll know!”

It would be impossible to communicate with the Warrior-Captain, who resided in the Royal Capital, from E-Rantel. More to the point, if she really was a simple village girl, it was unlikely that she would stay in the Warrior-Captain’s memory, so proving her identity would be hard.

“So what do we do?”

“Detain her for now, then investigate further. Given that she didn’t conceal that item, and was planning to take it into the city openly, she might not be a spy or a terrorist, but that is no guarantee.”

Enri looked around in a panic.

She looked just like a normal village girl. If this was an act, she must have been a very good actor.

Suddenly, one of the soldiers watching the perimeter exclaimed in surprise. At the same moment, a voice that Enri couldn't quite remember rang out.

"I wish to enter the city, but… what's going on?"

As they turned towards the voice, they saw a man wearing jet-black plate armor.

"Uooh!"

The soldiers and magic casters exclaimed in surprise. Everyone in E-Rantel knew the man who wore that armor. The adamantite plate which swayed over his chest was the conclusive proof of his identity. A living legend, a man who made the impossible possible, the ultimate warrior.

Momon from 'Darkness'.

"I-It's Momon-sama! My sincerest apologies!"

"Now, what's going on here… hm? This girl is…"

"Yes! Because of this girl, we spent a bit of time checking up on her. I apologize for any inconvenience we've caused Momon-sa—"

"—Enri, is it? Enri Emmot?"

The air in the room seemed to freeze over. Why would a legendary adventurer know a village girl's name?

"That, you are… ah, yes. That, that time, you were the adventurer who came with Enfi. Although I don't think I spoke to you… did you learn my name from Nfirea?”

Momon put his hand on his chin, as though he were thinking. Afterward, he gestured to the magic caster and they exited the blockhouse. Although the soldiers wanted to follow, they couldn’t leave Enri alone.

Only the magic caster, now calmed down, returned to the room.

“Let her go. That great man, Momon the Black, has vouched for her with his status as an adamantite-ranked adventurer. I think there’s no point in keeping her here. What do you think?”

“That’s an obvious decision… but, is it really all right?”

“Is it really all right to doubt him, of all people?”

“O-Of course not! I get it. We’ll grant her passage. Enri Emmot of Carne Village, you are allowed to enter the city. You may go.”

“Ah, yes. Thank you very much.”

After bowing quickly to them, Enri left the blockhouse. As her back receded into the distance, the soldier turned to the magic caster.

“What about Momon-sama?”

“He left first.”

“Then… what connection would that hero have with that village girl?”

“Hell if I know. Momon-dono told me what I told you, he vouched for her and asked that we let her go.”

“Then, another question. That Enri Emmot girl. Do you really think she’s just a village girl?”

“Certainly not. There’s no way she could be a simple village girl, otherwise why would a great hero like him help her? And it wasn’t a coincidence she was carrying that item… Could it have something to do with the Theocracy?”

“That Ainz Somethingorother fellow. If he’s from the Theocracy, shouldn’t we let the brass know?”

“Frankly speaking, I don’t know. After all, Momon-dono already vouched for her. If we let the people on top know… well, you would be just doing your job, but do you really want to upset Momon-dono?”

The soldier’s face twisted.

The exploits of Momon the Dark Hero in the graveyards of E-Rantel were a common conversation topic when the soldiers gathered.

There was nobody whose blood wouldn’t be boiling after hearing the legend of how a hero destroyed a horde of tens of thousands of undead. Even those who simply watched from afar could feel the overwhelming pressure of his heroic swordplay. The man who could make a mighty magical beast kneel before him and offer to serve as his mount set the soldiers’ hearts ablaze.

Just as women would have a crush on strong men, many men were admirers of Momon the Dark Hero, and it could be said that most of the armed forces of E-Rantel were his fans.

This soldier was one of them.

As a fan of Momon, just being patted on the shoulder by his idol was enough for him to boast about it to everyone he met. As such, he had no intention of upsetting the man he worshiped.

“There is that. Well, since Momon-sama vouched for her, I guess it’ll be fine.”

“I think so too. If we treat a friend of Momon-dono poorly, I don’t think it’ll turn out well. I guess all we can do is avoid rocking the boat. Now then… I guess I’ll go back to standing by.”

“Ayup. I’m heading back to my post too.”

♦ ♦ ♦

Enri drove the wagon with her back to the gate of E-Rantel’s city gate, wondering what on earth had just happened. That man in the jet-black armor — the adventurer who had come with Nfirea to Carne Village to pick herbs — he had helped her out of a tight spot.

By right, she should have immediately gone to thank him, but unfortunately she’d lost sight of him once she entered the city.

If I thank him the next time we meet… will he forgive me? Although she was thinking that she should immediately start searching for him once she had the time, there were reasons why she couldn’t. Those reasons were what she was currently worried about. She clutched a portion of her clothes, feeling for the horn inside it to banish her uneasiness.

The goblin-something horn.

This… this is worth several thousand gold coins? No way. Please tell me that's not true…

Enri's sweat flowed like a river. The horns had been given to her so casually that she hadn't expected it to be that valuable. No, Nfirea had said it was a high-end magic item… but the amount was beyond her imagination.

Is it alright for me to use this item? Will it be okay? If she was told to return the other one she had already used, what should she do?

I'll need several thousand urns of herbs… I might not be able to afford it in a lifetime of picking herbs… In addition, she had another item worth thousands of gold coins.

Is Gown-sama a man who can give out such items so easily?! Or maybe, he didn't know its value… no way, there's no way someone like him wouldn't know… but, if he didn't know…

Enri's stomach grumbled and ached.

She looked around her surroundings in suspicion. There weren't many people around, but it was still several times more than Carne Village. Was there anyone who would want to steal the horn? Other such distasteful ideas surfaced in Enri's heart.

If only I hadn't brought it out. There's a lot of crime here, right? What if the horn got stolen… if the horn was blown and goblins showed up to make trouble, wouldn't that make me the criminal?

Just as the cold sweat was pooling around Enri, a person descended on the seat next to her in the driver's cab. The way she landed like a feather in defiance of gravity must have been magic.

Who—

As the surprise of seeing the newcomer faded, an even bigger surprise was awaiting her.

She was a raven-haired beauty whose face could launch a thousand ships. She was the one who had come with the black-armored adventurer to her village. Her ice-cold eyes resembled nothing so much as onyxes as they turned to Enri.

“Inferior creature (gadfly). Momon-san wanted me to ask you a few questions—”

“So pretty…”

“Flattery will get—”

“As pretty as Lupusregina…”

As she saw the consternation in the eyes looking at her, Enri immediately regretted the stupid things she’d said. She probably didn’t even know about Lupusregina. However, there was nobody else who could even come close to the vision in front of her.

What should I do, I’ve upset her… well, that much is clear, but…

“About that, Lupusregina is a very pretty person in my village—”

“—Thank you.”

“Eh?!”

Her eyes were hard, and so was her voice, and even her eyebrows were straining. But the thanks she had given was genuine.

"…Haaaah. Momon-sa—san has some things to ask you, which is why I came. Don't waste time. Why are you here?"

Enri had no obligation to answer. However, this was the partner of someone who had helped her. If he wanted to know, then she should answer.

"That, before that, can I ask a favor of you? Momon-san helped me earlier, and I'm very, very grateful. Please tell him that."

"I will do so. So why are you here?"

"Ah, yes, I, I'm here, because there's a lot of things that need to be done, for instance, selling the herbs."

The woman gestured with her chin, indicating that Enri should continue speaking.

"Then, I'll go to the temple, to see if there's anyone who wants to move to our village to live. And then I need to go to the Adventurer's Guild to talk about some things. And I need to buy some things we can't get in the village, like weapons. Something like that…"

"I see. I understand what you've said. I will relay it to Momon-san."

With ethereally graceful movements which seemed independent of gravity, the woman alighted from the wagon, and left without looking back.

Enri’s impression of her was that of a frozen hurricane which tore people apart.

“She’s an amazing woman… it feels like she’s ten times more powerful than Brita-san…”

There were no girls in the village like her. Nabe had probably become an adventurer because her personality was like that. That made her feel even more troubled about her visit to the Adventurer’s Guild.

“Ahhhh, oh no!”

Nabe was a powerful adventurer, but Enri had only noticed after she had vanished. In addition, she was the partner of the man who had subdued the Wise King of the Forest. She might have been able to tell Enri about what was going on in the forest.

“The Giant of the East and the Serpent of the West, and whatever that Monument of Destruction is… if only I had asked her about all of those. Ah~ I’m such a dummy, why didn’t I think of that earlier?”
Enri drove her wagon through a gate while scolding herself for her carelessness.

♦♦♦

E-Rantel could be roughly divided into three zones, separated by the walls of the city. The middle zone was where people lived.

It was also where the Adventurer’s Guild could be found.

Ideally, it would have been safest to sell the herbs at the Pharmacist’s Guild. However, that would have involved a lot of troublesome paperwork, so she had chosen to go to the Adventurer’s Guild instead to use them as a go-between. She had considered drawing on Lizzie’s help for this, but Enri had decided that using her best friend’s grandmother’s name would be too shameless, and reconsidered.

The plan of going to the Adventurer’s Guild was Nfirea’s idea.

If Nfirea had come in person, they wouldn’t need to use the Guild and he could sell everything directly. A simple village girl like Enri doing this by herself would be left to the tender mercies of the shrewd members of the Pharmacist’s Guild.

Enri headed down the road Nfirea and Brita had told her about.

Although she had been travelling with the goblins before that, they were all waiting outside the city for Enri to finish her business. Ever since she had set out from the village, she realized that she was alone, and her hands gripped the reins even more rightly.

The tension stiffened Enri’s shoulders. Finally, unable to stand it any longer, she looked around in all directions and her destination was in front of her.

“I found it!”

Enri squealed a little squeal of joy. Now that she was here, she probably wouldn’t get lost.

She handed the reins of her wagon to the sentry standing at the door of the Adventurer’s Guild, and pushed open the door.

Inside, warriors in full plate armor, hunters with bows on the backs, and magic casters both arcane and divine were walking around. Some were enthusiastically swapping information about the monsters nearby, others were looking closely at the parchments on the nearby noticeboard, and a few were getting a feel for their newly-purchased gear.

The place was filled with a heat and activity that made Enri unsteady on her feet, a world of unrelenting scrutiny and tension. This was the world of adventurers.

Enri’s mouth dropped open as she beheld a sight she would never see in her village, then hurriedly shut it back up.

It was true that she hailed from the boondocks, and it was no surprise that she’d be startled by the mood of the big city, but for a girl her age, staring dumbly with her mouth agape was just shameful.

Enri set out, her back ramrod straight, consciously checking her movements so that she wouldn’t move the arms and legs on the same side or do anything which would make her a laughingstock. However, Enri started to have her doubts about whether it was all right for an obviously out-of-place village girl to be strolling so boldly amongst the muscular adventurers.

At the counter, she was welcomed by the receptionist’s smile.

“Welcome.”

“Y-yes, I’m here to visit.”

Enri locked eyes with the receptionist. Following which, the two of them smiled faintly. Enri felt her shoulders relax, for what might have been the first time since she came to E-Rantel.

“Then, may I ask what business you have with the Adventurer’s Guild?”

“Mm. First, I’d like to ask for some help with the sale of herbs.”

“Understood. Where are the herbs now?”

Enri told her they were on the wagon outside, and the receptionist turned to speak to a woman beside her.

“The appraiser is going to check it now, please wait within the Guild until he’s done.”

“Understood. Then, another thing… although we won’t be putting out a request right away, we might do so in the future.”

Enri crudely explained the situation to the receptionist. The other woman’s smiling face became more and more serious as she heard Enri’s story.

“Is that so… I’m just a receptionist, and I don’t decide the difficulty of requests, but if it involves the Wise King of the Forest, it might be a task that only the adamantite-ranked Momon-san can handle. Of course, his services will not be cheap.”

Enri sensed a shift in the receptionist’s mood. She seemed entirely unmotivated, as though she had decided “it’s no use even if I tell you, what a pain”.

While living with the goblins, Enri had gradually learned to read the emotions of others. This was because goblins were ugly and looked much different from humans, and she had worked hard to recognize and deduce their feelings. It was a way Enri had grown.

She must be thinking the village doesn’t have so much money, huh… well, given my clothes, it’s a reasonable conclusion to make… and she is pretty well-dressed, after all. Enri briefly compared her clothes to those of the receptionist, and concluded that fashion-wise, she was completely outclassed.

But clothes like these are far too cumbersome to work in, and they’re too expensive besides. Thus, according to Enri the woman, this battle was a draw.

“Then, I heard the city would provide a subsidy…”

“That’s correct. However, the subsidy is only a portion of the fee, and you’ll have to pay the rest yourself. Adamantite-ranked adventurers are very expensive, and even after the subsidy they’ll still cost a lot of money to hire. Of course, you could offer less money for a request, but the Adventurer’s Guild would never allow it. If you offer less money than the minimum required, your request will be placed under low priority, so you may have to consider that there may be no takers.”

She must have memorized the regulations given the way she’d rattled that off with eyes glazed. The receptionist looked at Enri like a customer who wasn’t buying.

That was only natural. A customer who didn’t spend money wasn’t a customer at all. Everything the receptionist had said was turning out like how Nfirea predicted, so she didn’t feel too upset. It was a reality that nobody would help the weak.

Ainz Ooal Gown-sama is truly the village’s savior for helping us. And he even gave a simple village girl like me a valuable treasure like that. She wondered how the receptionist would react if she used this horn as payment. It would be great to see the look on her face, but Enri knew she would never do such a thing. This item had been given to her by that great magic caster with the instruction to “use it to protect yourself”. She couldn’t sell it off, not even for the village’s sake. She couldn’t do such an ungrateful thing.

“Understood. Then, please tell me how much the fees will be. That way I can go back to the village to discuss things.”

“If it’s like that… then how about this? Please come back after the inspection for the herb sales are done, that way we should have finished calculating the amount.”

After thanking the receptionist, Enri left the counter and sat on a sofa in the lounge, staring at the ceiling to while away the time while the inspection dragged on.

So tired…

Every moment since she’d entered the city gates had been a grand adventure. Or rather, when she thought about it, ever since the day her parents had died, the confusing things had just piled on.

All I wanted was to lead a simple, unchanging life in the village…

As she thought about the things she’d lost, Enri sighed.

She thought about what had happened after that — the goblins, her childhood friend, and shook her head.

Can't they go any faster…

If she had something to do, she wouldn't have the free time to think about such depressing things. She would rather focus on work than think about things that made her sad.

"Enri-san, the appraisal is complete."

Enri rose and headed for the sound of the merchant's voice.

"Thank, thank you very much!"

"The fee is—"

At this moment, Enri heard the sound of someone striding, no, practically sprinting over to her. As she turned, she saw the receptionist from earlier in front of her.

"Haaa— haaa— Enri-san of Carne Village. No, I mean, Enri-sama. About the matter from earlier, could I discuss the details to you?"

This was the same receptionist from just now, but her attitude was completely different. Even her eyes were bloodshot.

"Ah, I'm sorry, but I was just about to tell her about the results of the appraisal—"

"You shut up, I'm talking here."

The receptionist's reply made the merchant's face twitch.

“If it’s alright with you, would you like to discuss this over a drink in the receiving room?”

She was smiling, but the smile didn’t reach her eyes. Instead, there was a desperate, struggling feeling in them.

Perhaps she had sensed something from the confused Enri. The receptionist’s eyes were moist, and her hands were clasped together as though in prayer.

“Please, I’m begging you, you have to let me hear you out! If not, I’ll be done for!”

After hearing that desperate, almost pathetic plea, Enri didn’t want to talk to her at all, but it seemed too cruel not to give her a chance. She glanced back to the merchant, who seemed to pick up on her intentions, because he nodded slightly to her.

“Got, got it. Then, could you show me the way?”

The receptionist’s body visibly relaxed as she heard the reply.

“Thank you very much! Really, thank you very much! Come, come, let me show you the way.”

Enri followed after her, bathed in the curious stares of everyone around. The receptionist was tightly gripping her right hand, as though she didn’t want Enri to escape.

Was I too rash?

She entered the waiting room with traces of unease in her heart.

Enri silently looked around the inside of the room. It was unoccupied except for herself and intricately decorated, filled with furniture that looked so expensive she wondered if it was even meant to be sat on.

“Come, come, please, have a seat.”

Part of her wondered if she would be arrested or bound or confined the moment she sat down.

However, nothing happened when she sat on the sofa. All she felt was the comfortable furniture taking her body weight.

“Would you like something to drink? How about some liquor? Too early? Yes, kind of… how about fruits… no, sweets and desserts, maybe?”

“Ah, there’s no need to go to that extent…”

The dramatic change in the receptionist’s attitude was starting to scare Enri. In the first place, she hadn’t felt that the receptionist was treating her coldly. She had reacted naturally, without such extreme emotions. At the very least, it seemed much more normal than she did now.

But why had this leopard changed its spots? Was it because of the horn again?

“No, no, what are you saying? Anything is possible for you. We can provide liquor, brandy, and the snacks to go with them too.”

“No, there’s really no need… and besides, I’m running out of time. Can we start discussing the matter?”

“Certainly! You’re absolutely right! Then please, by all means, do continue!”

The receptionist whipped out a pad of pure white paper. All the paper she had seen before had been much coarser and had other colors mixed in. This must be some high-class stuff here. Was it really all right to use it?

Enri began speaking. Although the preamble had been easy enough to talk about, this was the annoying part — the details.

Finally, just as Enri’s throat was starting to dry out, the conversation finally came to an end.

“Thank you for your help! There’s some drinks here, please help yourself before you leave! It’s fine to leave the cups here, but thank you for coming to us today!”

The receptionist suddenly stood up, and left the room as though she had been chased from it.

“Really… what happened?”

Of course, there was nobody here to answer her rhetorical question.

♦♦♦

In the end, Enri didn’t spend the night in E-Rantel and headed back home to Carne Village.

She would be sleeping on the plains, but she didn’t feel worried. On the contrary, she had a very good night’s sleep. That was because of the goblins, who were riding shotgun on her cargo-laden wagon.

“Ahh~ I see it at last.”

Ahead of them was the wall of Carne Village. Although the neatly-arranged logs looked impressive in their own right, Enri couldn’t help but think they looked shabby compared to E-Rantel’s fortifications.

“Indeed. I need to report to the chief quickly.”

Enri was saying this to one of the goblins in the bed of the wagon. Five goblins had gone to E-Rantel with Enri as her protection, including Cona the priest and a goblin wolfrider, who was currently keeping a distance to spot any potential threats.

“Well, most of the problems have been dealt with, but how about the chief’s request, Ane-san?”

“Yes, about that… according to the priests, almost nobody wants to move to the village.”

“That’s strange. I mean, there’s already other immigrants from other villages here. Why doesn’t the number of residents increase? Was the priest lying?”

“No, a priest would never lie,” Enri smiled faintly. “To be honest, frontier villages are pretty dangerous, so they’re keeping their distance. Although some people look forward to it, like those third sons who’ll immediately abandon the city if they get a chance for a plot of land… but not many people will come here without an order. And the people who moved here in the beginning had lived in frontier villages like us. There’s a difference.”

“Is that so…”

“That’s how it is. But actually, that kind of relieves me.”

It would probably be very difficult for normal people to form a good relationship with goblins and live with them in the same village. Any immigrants from the city would probably blanch at the sight and do their best to stay away.

And frankly speaking, if Enri were forced to choose between the city-dwellers and the goblins, she would choose the goblins without hesitation.

At this moment, the wagon shook, and the sound of something metallic hitting the wagon bed rang out from behind her.

“Ah, sorry. Are you alright?”

Enri turned her head to look behind.

Although the goblins were seated on the floor of the wagon, there were some sacks there, one of which made the metallic noise when the wagon shook.

“Ah, we’re fine, Ane-san. No need to worry. Speaking of which, with this many arrows, we’ll be able to hunt to our hearts’ content.”

The goblins looked so happy when they looked at the bag that Enri forgot to reply to them, simply smiling instead.

They crossed the wheat fields, and entered a half-opened gate.

After greeting everyone, Enri drove the wagon to their original meeting point, in order to unload the cargo.

As she stopped the wagon at the meeting point, the goblins within, having heard the wagon, streamed out to greet her.

“Oh! Welcome back, Ane-san. I’m glad nothing happened.”

Enri smiled. Their welcome was what made Enri feel that she had really returned to the village, because to her, the goblins were part of her family.

“I’m home!”

“That’s a lot of stuff. Are you bringing it inside?”

“That’s right, bro. Do me a favor and lend me a hand.”

“Coming!”

The goblins moved as one, deftly unloading the cargo. Some went here, some went there, and eventually all the items were packed away without the need for Enri to direct them. This was the proof of how much the goblins had integrated themselves into village life.

“Ah, Ane-san, let us handle the rest. Why don’t you go meet your sister and Ani-san? Although I don’t know if Ani-san’s still helping with Agu’s people.”

“Thank you, but I still need to report to the chief first.”

“Really? Got it. Then, just to be safe, I’ll come with you. After all, there’s still the matter of the ogres.”

Gokoh spoke to some of his comrades after leaving the meeting place, and then he hopped up onto the wagon beside Enri, who was driving. The other goblins who had been guarding Enri on the road to E-Rantel looked at him with jealousy in their eyes, but none of them actually voiced any opposition. It was probably because they agreed he was doing the right thing.

“Then, Ane-san, let’s go!”

Enri smiled faintly and said, “I'm counting on you guys! And thank you very much!”

After thanking the goblins, she spurred her horse into motion.

“So, what happened in the village since I left?”

“Nothing special. The big thing was that we built a place where the ogres could stay inside the village. Of course, the stone golems did most of the work, and it was pretty crudely made out of wood, but in the end, it ended up being a pretty nice place. However, we can’t do anything about their smell. Even the towels we give them end up stinking.”

“So that’s how… but it’s still really fast!”

“Like I said, the golems did most of the work. If you want to thank someone, thank the magic caster who gave them to us.”

“And Lupusregina-san, right?”

“…Let’s not talk about her for now. I don’t want to do anything related to thanking her. Something about her just pisses me off.”

Enri found it hard to believe her ears. This was the first time Gokoh had ever spoken ill of someone.

“How should I put it… she’s very scary, like a monster watching us… I don’t think Ane-san’s sensed it yet…”

“But she’s the maid of the one who saved our village, Ainz Ooal Gown, so she can’t be that bad.”

“…Ah, what a pain~”

Enri and Gokoh’s shoulders twitched. Speak of the devil…

Enri looked back frantically, and just like the day before, the maid was sitting on the wagon bed like she belonged there.

“Really, En-chan, it’s such a pain.”

“What do you mean?”

“Maybe, maybe before that, you should tell us how you appear out of nowhere.”

“Mm? It’s simple. I fell out of the sky.”

“That’s not going to fly. There’s quite a few times you’ve come from above now, but we couldn’t sense you.”

“I can make myself invisible, yanno. I’m trying to be subtle about what I do. See how nice I am~”

Gokoh turned his face to the front once more. Irritation was written all over it.

“But, ah, yes. It’s kind of rare that we get to see Lupusregina-san two days in a row. Did something happen?”

Lupusregina turned an annoyed look on Enri. *Even when she’s angry, she still looks beautiful,* Enri thought.

“Well, kind of. Buuuut anyway, I was just wondering what was going on. Speaking of which, what happened to that miniature gobbo of yours?”

“…He’s fine. I think he should be in the Chief’s house.”

“Why the Chief’s house?”

“Ah, could you help the goblins from my tribe, or something like that. They’re staying there while we build a place for the goblins to stay in the village.”

“Ah— yeah, it kind of makes sense, Agu’s the son of his tribe’s chief. He must feel like he has a duty to protect them or something. Really, he’s just a kid but he’s acting like a man~”

Although Lupusregina was just smiling lightly, anyone who saw it would be captivated by the charm radiating from her. Even Enri found herself looking longingly at her despite the fact that they were both women.

“Aiya, shouldn’t you be watching your front instead?”

“That, that’s right!”

Enri, blushing to the tips of her ears, hastily looked to her front once more.

After stopping in front of the chief’s house, Enri and Gokoh got off the wagon.

“Then, I’ll bring the horse back to the stables. Don’t feel like disturbing you guys. Let me know what you guys talked about later~”

“I understand. Then, I’m sorry for imposing, but we’re counting on you.”

Enri bowed to Lupusregina, who smiled with a “hoho” and drove the wagon off.

Enri knocked on the door, announced herself loudly enough for everyone inside to hear, and opened the door.

The Chief and Agu were facing each other across a table.

“Oh, welcome back. Please, have a seat. How were things in the city?”

As the Chief spoke, Enri sat herself beside Agu. For a moment Agu’s body seemed to go stiff, but that must have been a trick of the light.

“Ah, then, that’s it for me. In that case, Chief, please take care of us.”

Enri had no idea who those words were meant for. Since the only others present were Enri, Gokoh and the Chief, it seemed obvious that they had been intended for the village chief.

However, Agu had been looking at her, with a stiff back and pursed lips. Enri looked into Agu’s eyes, and in his steadfast, unblinking gaze, she realised that he was not kidding or playing a trick.

“Eh…eh?!”

Why did it have to be her?

Amidst Enri’s confusion, Agu excused himself and left the Chief’s home.

“Hey! Wait—”

“Then, Enri, can you tell me about it?”

“Eh? No, that… this… ah, yes. I get it.”

It weighed heavily on her mind, but she could clear up her doubts later. The report was more important for now.

After deciding that, Enri clearly and concisely related the events that had occurred in the city. The most important part was that nobody wanted to move to Carne Village. However, the chief seemed to have anticipated this, because there was no regret on his face, only calm acceptance.

“So that’s how it is. Well, it can’t be helped. We’re a frontier village, so people won’t want to move where the monster appearance rates were high.”

The village chief said what Enri had been thinking. It might have well been what everyone in the village had already accepted.

“You’ve done a lot for us. Thank you.”

The chief lowered his head, and Enri said, “It’s all right,” in return. It had been confusing at times, but it had also been a good experience.

“Then—” the chief’s line of sight flickered to Gokoh for a second. “There is one thing I would like to entrust to Enri Emmot.”

“Ah, yes. What is it? You’re being so serious, Chief…”

“…I hope you will carry on in my position as village chief.”

Enri’s expression would have transcended acting in terms of how quickly and dramatically her face changed.

“Haaaaaaaa?! What, what is this? Hey! Don’t tell me Agu was saying those… ehhhh?!”

“You getting flustered won’t help…”

“Don’t interrupt me when I’m flustered! Chief, are you retarded? Why are you saying this?!”

“…Maybe retarded is a bit much. I understand you’re excited and nervous about this — I know that much, but I’m hoping you can calm down and listen to me.”

“Calm down, how can I calm down? I’m just a girl, why do I have to deal with this village chief crap?!”

“Get a hold of yourself!”

The voice was full of power, but to Enri it was just a little loud. Even so, it helped her regain a bit of her composure. No, if she didn’t listen to the chief, she'd never make sense of things, or at least that was what part of her was thinking.

"I understand that you're very confused. However, I hope you can sit down and consider things with a clear head. For starters, who is the heart of the village?"

"Isn't that you, Chief?"

"That would be incorrect. This old man feels that you are the heart of the village. The goblins and the newly-arrived ogres all acknowledge you as their leader, right?"

"That's correct. We're all loyal to Ane-san from the bottom of our hearts."

"Then, there's the goblins you helped. From what Agu's told me, they also see you as the boss."

Enri's mouth turned into the shape of a 'Λ'. It might be true that the goblins were that way, but what would the villagers think? They would never accept this.

"I can guess at what you're thinking. The villagers will object, is that it? I've already spoken with everyone and gotten their approval. Last night, we had a meeting of the villagers and got their opinions. And it was unanimous — they all wanted you to be the new chief."

"But, but how?!"

"…That attack was a huge shock for all of us, Enri. Everybody is hoping for a strong ruler."

“How am I strong? I’m just a simple village girl!”

Although there was some muscle on her arms, she was still a village girl who could barely use a weapon. If they wanted strength, they should have asked the self-defense force, shouldn’t they?

“Strength is not measured by one’s muscle alone. Don’t you think being able to order the goblins around is a form of strength too? The Bareare boy said that while putting your name forward.”

“Enfi!”

Enri let out a sound like someone strangling a chicken to death.

“That, and this old man is getting on in years. I need to find a successor soon.”

“What do you mean, ‘old man’? Chief isn’t anywhere near old. Is that why you’ve been talking like an old man?”

The chief was around his mid-forties, so it was still a bit early to be calling him old. After all, he was still at an age where he could contribute to the village’s work.

“Leaving aside the matter of talking like an old man, you should have noticed by now, but the forest around the village is undergoing a number of changes. Since the Virtuous King of the Forest is gone, there’s a higher chance of monsters coming out of the forest to attack. Under these circumstances, I’m not suitable to be the chief.”

“Chief, this may be rude, but I need to ask. I can’t get out of this, can I?”

“…Frankly? Even if you refused, I couldn’t do much about it.”

What Enri saw was the eyes of a man who was honestly speaking his mind.

“I still remember that day even now. That horrible day when my friends in the village were killed. I knew the Emmots well. If we hadn’t lived idly, if we had built a wall, if we had been on guard, maybe we wouldn’t have suffered so much… maybe we could have held out until Gown-sama came to help us.”

That would be tough, Enri thought. This village also had a lot of immigrants who were survivors from the other destroyed villagers. Their villages had sturdy walls — though not as strong as Carne Village’s at the present — but they had still been attacked and slaughtered. But those walls could have delayed the attackers by just a little bit and allowed more people to be saved. Enri agreed on that part.

“The old way of thinking I had isn’t going to work anymore. We need to reorganize and protect the village’s safety with our own hands. The only ones who can do this… are the flexible, the young, and along with this they need strength as well.”

The chief had said his piece. He looked calmly at Enri.

As the chief spoke, Enri had listened seriously to him. At first, she wanted to refuse because the burden was too heavy. If they were attacked again, she wasn’t sure she could bear responsibility for the lives of her fellow villagers. However, like the chief said, she couldn’t just run away from it.

“I don’t know if I can accept this responsibility.”

“That’s a natural reaction. The goblins and I can help with the administration of the village. Even if I say that, though, it’s always scary to have to make the big decisions.”

“What about a council formed from the villagers?”

“To be frank, I’d thought of that myself. However, the bigger the problem, the more likely something will come up that will split up the group and leave them paralyzed by indecision. In the end, without one person calling the shots, we won’t be able to solve problems effectively.”

“What if we had two systems, one for dealing with things in normal situations and the other for emergencies?”

“That won’t work. It won’t nurture our leaders. The people will follow their leaders in emergencies and work together because they know those leaders are also capable in peacetime.”

The chief’s will was firm and he had explained his reasons. With a sour expression, Enri asked her final question.

“…When do you need my answer?”

“I won’t rush you for it. Take your time and consider it.”

“I understand.”

After Enri said this, she stood and left.

♦♦♦

As she left the Chief’s house, Gokoh followed behind Enri.

“Say, I want to think about this by myself, could I have some space?”

“Got it, Ane-san. Then, take your time and think about it. The rest of us will back you up, Ane-san. If you need anything at all, just let us know.”

“Yeah, I’ll be counting on you then.”

After watching Gokoh leave, Enri returned to her own home.

Can I be a good chief?

Enri didn’t feel confident of that at all.

Who knew, when the time came, she might have to give an order she didn’t like — sacrificing the few for the greater good.

I can’t do that at all…

Everyone in the village thinks too highly of me. For starters, the goblins that everyone says are my strength, they weren’t even allies I made with my own charisma and connections. In the end, they were merely summoned from the horn given to me by the great magic caster Ainz Ooal Gown.

That item was the first bit of help the village received— *Strange, was I the first person he helped? I do remember Gown-sama in a mask… Hm? Was he wearing a mask?*

Her memories of that incident were muddled, but that was only to be expected given the chaos of the situation.

Enri shook her head to clear out her doubts.

In any case…

If the horn had been given to anyone else, that person would be the next chief, not herself. Which meant that the problem wasn’t a matter of Enri’s own competence, but it had been nothing more than sheer dumb luck.

I should talk to someone about this…

Nfirea was the first person she thought of. He’d lived in the big city before, seen a lot of people, and Enri felt that he would know if she could be the next chief. And he was widely read, so he would definitely be able to give her an answer.

However, the chief had said that Nfirea — or rather, the Bareares — had approved of her succession. That meant that even if she talked with Nfirea, he would end up pushing her for the position.

He won’t do… and neither will any of the villagers. That leaves Agu and the ogres, but Agu already thinks of me as the chief, and the ogres are just plain dumb.

At this moment, someone called out to the frowning Enri with a cheerful voice.

“Ossu~ Seems like they’re done talking… Oya? What’s wrong, you’ve got a strange look on your face? Problem, Enri?”

That voice made Enri tingle as though electricity were coursing through her skin. That’s right. She was an outsider to the village, a neutral third party who could calmly and logically assess the situation.

Enri ran toward Lupusregina with all her strength.

“Lupusregina-san!”

She tightly clutched the surprised maid’s shoulders.

“What what what what’s this? Oh no~ My heart’s beating so fast. But please don’t confess to me. I’m not a lesbian, I like the opposite sex. Noooooo~ Let me go~ I’m going to be raped su~”

“Wait! Please, wait a bit!”

Enri’s hands left her shoulders, because she was planning to cover Lupusregina’s mouth. But she nimbly slipped out of Enri’s grasp and smiled to her.

“Ahhhh, sorry, sorry, but you seemed so excited, I thought I needed to cool you down a bit. It was just a joke su~”

“It’s a really bad joke…”

Enri sagged her shoulders. However, she immediately recovered again. Lupusregina was a person who came and went as she pleased, if she didn’t take this opportunity to pin her down she would vanish again.

“Please hear me out. I need some advice on what to do next!”

“I dunno what you’re talking about, but we can talk while we walk right? I don’t want the villagers to look at me strangely~”

Enri’s face turned bright red. Lupusregina had a point there. However —

“Buuuut if you want to violate me again I won’t scream~”

“Ggk!”

Lupusregina stuck her tongue out playfully at Enri.

“Really — really, Lupusregina-san!”

“Come, come, let’s go, let’s go.”

Without waiting for an answer, Lupusregina set off, and Enri followed.

“Well, come lay your problems onto onee-san — from the secrets of H stuff to seducing men~”

“Ah, is that right? Lupusregina-san really is an adult then…”

To Enri, who knew nothing about such matters, she certainly seemed adult enough. There was no obvious change, but for some reason Lupusregina seemed to look more mature now.

“Ahem! I am a mimidoshima after all!”
[TL. mimidoshima is a young woman who is inexperienced but has a lot of knowledge on h-stuff]

“…huh?”

What does “mimidoshima” mean? As Enri pondered the strange term, Lupusregina beckoned her over with a “come hither” gesture. Eager to get the suspicious questions over and done with, Enri began telling her about what had happened in the chief’s house.

“So, what should I do?”

“Hm? Beats me.”

That was all.

“Hey — didn’t you say I could lay my problems on you?”

“Aw, do I *have* to answer you… hm, well, whatevs. To begin with, if you’re being pushed into this position and you know you’re going to regret it, then you’d better not take it on to begin with. Think about what kind of things you can and can’t handle.”

The usual carefree girl was gone, and in her place was a haunting, bewitching beauty. The usually wide-open eyes were narrowed, and the inviting smile now sent a chill down her spine.

“This is just my opinion anyways; you should probably decide what you want to do on your own. Sit down, chew the cud a little, that sort of thing. For starters, let me put this out here, it doesn’t matter if you’re the chief or someone else is the chief, you’re going to mess up sooner or later. There’s only forty-one people I know who’ll never make a mistake. ‘Cos of that, no point worrying about what happens when you fail. But when you think about it, nobody’s better suited to the job than you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ask the gobs. When the village is attacked by scary monsters and they know they can’t win, what happens? Imagine the situation with yourself as the chief and yourself not being the chief.”

Lupusregina’s expression changed again, back to her cheerful self.

“Welp, that’s about it. Haaa, I don’t want to play counsellor at all. Then again if En-chan didn’t become the chief, the beautiful tragedy would unfold and it would be more fun.”

“—Eh?”

Lupusregina smirked as she patted Enri’s shoulder.

“Personally, I think you’d make a great chief. Also… why don’t you ask that boy?”

After taking her hand off Enri’s shoulder, Lupusregina twirled in place. It was a movement that seemed estranged from any concept of the word “friction”.

“Seeya then.”

Lupusregina strode off, her hands flying freely through the air. In front of her stood Nfirea with Nemu’s hand in his. Lupusregina patted Nfirea on the shoulder, and as though she had flipped a switch, the two came to life.

“Welcome back, onee-san!”

Nemu must have been very worried, because she tackle hugged Enri while running at full speed. Enri was hit hard enough that she thought she might be knocked down, but her sturdy leg muscles absorbed the impact.

“Welcome back, Enri. You’re earlier than expected. Didn’t spend the night?”

“I’m home. And yes, I camped out last night.”

“Is that so… I’m glad you weren’t attacked by monsters. Still, I can’t approve of that sort of thing. The goblins are strong. but there’s still monsters stronger than them. Granted, I haven’t seen any of those near the plains…”

“Nee-san, don’t do dangerous things!”

Nemu said this while clinging tightly to Enri’s clothes. Enri was the only family for her little sister. Her life was no longer solely hers. It seemed like Enri had forgotten that little detail.

“You’re right. I’m sorry.”

Enri smiled and gently ruffled Nemu’s hair.

“Mm! Then I’ll forgive Nee-san!”

Nemu looked up and smiled.

“Thank you. Speaking of which, has Nemu been a good girl? You didn’t bother Enfi, did you?”

“I didn’t! Really~ I’m not a little girl anymore! Right, Enfi-kun?”

“Ahaha… well, I’ve been treating Agu’s tribespeople, so I didn’t look too closely, but I trust Nemu’s behaved herself.”

“Really, Enfi-kun! Say, how about this, Nee-san. Enfi-kun stinks!”

“Nemu-chan! That’s the smell of herbs! When you grind them up, didn’t you say your hands stank as well?”

“That colorful stuff is from herbs?”

“…No, it’s different. That’s from making alchemical items, so please don’t say I stink…”

“But you *do* stink!”

Nfirea’s face froze.

“Mm, It’s all over Enfi’s clothes. So maybe he should take them off when he’s not working?”

Enri frantically tried to explain her little sister’s actual meaning, and Nfirea’s face softened as he heard it.

“I don’t have any other clothes, though… in E-Rantel I pretty much wore those all the time.”

“Then, what if I made a set for you afterwards?”

“Eh? You can do that?”

“Enfi, who do you think I am? I can still make simple clothes on my own.”

“Is that it? I bought all my clothes, so being able to make your own sounds awesome.”

“Well, thanks for that. But everyone in the village can… Nemu, you’d better start learning.”

“Kay~”

“Then, Nemu, do you mind heading back first? I need to discuss something with Enfi.”

Nemu covered her mouth with her hands, but the smile was already making her eyes sparkle.

“Mm! Got it! Then, I’ll be going first. Good luck, Enfi-kun!”

Nemu waved to them, then headed back home with a spring in her step.

Enri watched her as she left, mumbling to herself.

“She’s so obedient. Nevermind, are you hiding anything from me?”

“No, I don’t think… ah, you mean that? Is that it? Although I can roughly guess, since I was at the town council meeting yesterday.”

With that, they’d skipped over a lot of pointless exposition. Enri told Nfirea what she and the chief had discussed.

It didn’t stop there either. She also told him about her discussion with Lupusregina, and Nfirea took it all in without a single word. After she finished, Nfirea looked Enri straight in the eye. and spoke.

“I think Enri can do it and no matter what your answer is, I’ll always support you… ugh, that line is so cheesy. I hope you’ll become the new chief.”

“Why? I’m just—”

“No. You’re not just a simple village girl. You’re the leader of the goblins, Enri Emmot. You probably want to say that the goblins aren’t your strength, right? But in the end, the goblins really are your strength. Lupusregina asked you to ask the goblins, but I’ll explain. If you’re not the chief, and if the village is in danger, the goblins will fight a holding action until you can escape by yourself.”

“No way! They would never do such a thing!”

“They might say that in peacetimes. However, during a crisis they’ll do just that. I heard it from them myself.”

“No way…”

Enri looked incredulously at Nfirea. Was he lying? But there wasn’t even a shred of deception in the air around him.

“The most important thing to them isn’t the village, it’s you. But if you become the chief, then the village becomes your property, and the goblins will stay and fight for the village to the bitter end. It may not seem like a big difference, but it is a difference. As an aside, they’ve told me that if an emergency like that happens, they’re hoping I can take Nemu and flee behind you. Enri… if you want to check with them it’s fine. But I hope that if you do, you’ll keep the fact that I told you about it a secret.”

“I won’t ask them.”

Nfirea lifted his hair up as he heard the straight, direct reply, revealing his wide eyes.

“Is that okay? I might be ly—”

“—That’s not possible. Nfirea wouldn’t lie to me. I trust you. However, is the master really that
important to her summons?”

“Well, wouldn’t that be because you’re their master? You bought weapons for the goblins, right? Don’t you think they’d make you their top priority because of that? It may sound bad, but the goblins have never gotten anything from the villagers, who treat them as nothing more than your summoned monsters. Who do you think they’d prioritize, the people who barely acknowledge them, or the person who feeds them and arms them?”

Of course, none of the villagers would actually say that sort of thing out loud. However, it was true that she couldn’t remember any of the villagers thanking them in any concrete way.

“…But, the villagers are grateful to the goblins.”

“They’re grateful to *you*. It’s like paying you back for expenses incurred and time spent. Have you ever seen anyone in the village call the goblins by name?”

There were none. At first she thought it was simply because they couldn’t tell them apart, but when you thought about it, it was because they didn’t want to tell them apart.

The thought of that filled Enri with an indescribable loneliness.

“Is that so.”

Yet, in her voice was not simply dejection, but her eyes shone with the light of revelation.

“That’s right. That’s why I, personally, feel that you’ll be a good chief. If nothing else, when you’re chief, you’ll change things for the goblins.”

“…Everyone’s going to help me, right?”

“Of course. You might as well say nobody will hold back in rendering their aid.”

“I understand. Then, I’ll head over to the chief’s place. I’d better do it before I change my mind!”

Enfi smiled as he heard Enri’s declaration.

He understood the storm of emotions behind Enri’s decision. It was a stern, yet kind frame of mind.

“All right! Good luck, Enri!”

She nodded in reply, and then without looking back, set foot on the path to becoming the new chief.

♦♦♦

From the sky, Lupusregina could see that almost everyone in the village was gathered in the village square. Enri was at their head, addressing them, but she couldn’t hear what Enri was saying.

After Enri appeared to finish, the villagers were applauding.

“Ha… so it did turn out like this after all. Ahhhh, I can’t take it, uhihihi.”

“—What’s so funny?”

The voice from behind made Lupusregina turn around to face it.

“Oya~ isn’t that Yuri-nee? Are you flying because of a magic item?”

“That’s right. Ainz-sama bestowed it upon me himself. This would be… Carne Village, right? That would be why you were scolded.”

“That’s right. Ahhh, now the fun’s about to begin~”

“What do you mean?”

“A new leader has just arisen within the village. To the villagers, they’re about to turn to a new page in their history. However, I wonder what would happen if, at this glorious moment, the village was attacked and everything set ablaze. I wonder what kind of faces those villagers would make?”

A sadistic grin spread over her beautiful face, and anyone who saw her would immediately conclude that something evil and horrible had been unleashed.

“And I thought you got along with these people. Is this coming from the bottom of your heart?”

“That’s right, Yuri-nee~ I mean every word of it. Every time I think of the people I get along with getting trampled like ants and exterminated with brute force, I can’t help but laugh.”

“You’re terrible. You’re as bad as Solution. Why are my little sisters like this? Really, the only good one is Shizu… although I suppose Entoma isn't a bad girl.”

Lupusregina laughed as her older sister grumbled.

“Ah~ will the village be destroyed after all?”

Part 4

“Ah, I’m so tired.”

Enri dumped the small slate she was holding on the table and flopped down, devoid of energy. She turned to look at the source of the quiet laughter and saw Nfirea there with a smile that said ‘just as planned’ on his face.

“You’ve worked hard, Enri.”

“It’s soooo haaaaard~ I’m not good at using my head…”

“You need to learn how to read and write, you know.”

Enri’s reply was a mournful whine.

As the village chief she needed a basic level of education, which was why Nfirea was personally instructing her, but Enri’s head felt like it was splitting apart.

“These stupid words, they were made up just to give me trouble…”

“Don’t say that. You’ve already learned how to write your own name, haven’t you? And Nemu-chan’s as well.”

“Mm… well, that is a good thing… can’t I get by with just that much?”

“Alas! These are merely the basics. Look at it this way, you’ve only started learning for five days, we haven’t even reached the important parts yet.”

An ‘are you kidding me’ expression appeared on Enri’s face.

“Ahhh, don’t make a face like that. Once you learn the basics, they’ll serve you well. That’s why they’re so important.”

“Hmph.”

“You look really tired. Then, we’ll stop here for today.”

As though she’d been waiting for this word, Enri sprang up from her seat.

“That’s wonderful! Let’s end early tomorrow too! Thank you, Enfi!”

Nfirea smiled thinly before wiping the chicken scratch-like letters off the slate.

“Then you’d best get a good rest. Tomorrow we’ll start again at the same time.”

“I’m really happy that you’re using your experiment time to teach me all this. But I don’t want to be grateful at all…”

“Mm. Well, that’s how it is. They say it’s better for a teacher to be hated by their students than to be thanked by them.”

“That’s a lie! It’s a total lie!”

“Ahahaha. Ah, I’m out of time. Goodnight, Enri.”

“Mm. Goodnight. Don’t work too hard when you get back and sleep early.”

Nfirea smiled to show he understood, and then he left through the front door. After watching the floating mote of his magical light recede into the distance, Enri returned to her house. In the darkness, it felt especially lonely.

“Ah— I’m so tired…”

Enri lazily stripped off her clothing and burrowed under the covers. She’d been so noisy when learning just now, but now all she could hear were the cute sounds of her little sister sleeping. Enri calmly closed her eyes.

Having worked her brains so hard earlier, Enri was certain she would fall asleep right away. Just as she expected, she passed out within seconds of closing her eyes.

She didn’t know how long she’d slept, but a distant sound woke her from her slumber.

Three knocks. A pause, and then three more knocks.

Realizing what that signal meant, Enri forced her eyes open in the darkness. Having woken with abnormal speed and realizing she was still at home, she practically leapt out of bed. In the same moment her sister bolted awake too.

“Are you alright?”

“Mm.”

Her voice had threads of fear in it, but it sounded like she could still move.

“Get ready now!”

“Mm!”

Lighting a lamp would waste too much time, so Enri prepared herself to flee in the dark.

As the sound of the bells carried over the wind, Enri and Nemu readied themselves swiftly. Theirs was a speed born not just of repeated evacuation drills, but of the old terror that remained from when their village had been attacked in the past. And after hearing Agu’s words, she had an idea of what was to come.

“Nemu! Get to the rendezvous point! I’ll go take care of the others!”

Without waiting for her sister’s answer, Enri grabbed Nemu’s hand and ran out the door.

The bell was still ringing loudly, which meant there was an emergency situation. This was definitely a sign that an attack as coming.

The training sequence for the evacuation repeated itself countless times in her heart, and she couldn’t completely abandon her desire to run away from reality and this, but the chill in the air denied it. It was the same chill that was there when the soldiers attacked the village.

As they neared the rendezvous point, Enri pushed Nemu forward.

“All right, go!”

Nemu nodded very slightly in reply, and then dashed toward the meeting place.

However, as a days-old village chief, Enri had to consider how she would move the whole village.

The bad feelings she had before assuming the position now flowed out uncontrollably from her heart.

“It’s as though the gods want to see me suffer.”

Without thinking, Enri let the words slip out of her mouth. This was the worst-case scenario.

A goblin ran up to Enri.

“What happened? What’s going on?”

“We found monsters in the forest. High chance they’ll be attacking us.”

“Understood, now let’s go!”

With the goblin leading the way, Enri soon came to the main gate. She saw that the night-time barricades were set up and the goblins were massing here. Wearing the weapons and armor Enri had bought for them, they looked like seasoned veterans.

As she drew close she could scent a stink on the air, which clued Enri in to the fact that there were ogres present. The ogres clutched their new clubs, which looked spiky and menacing.

Along with Enri, a panting Nfirea and the members of the self-defence force led by Brita gathered at the main gate. Agu and some of his fellow goblins, the ones who had recovered enough from their ordeal to fight, stood with them as well.

“Is that everyone? How about Madam Lizzie? Did something keep her?”

Nfirea’s grandmother Lizzie was a notable magic caster in her own right. It wouldn’t have been out of place for her to take part in the village’s defense.

“No, Obaa-chan’s not coming here. She’s at the rendezvous point. That place is important too.”

The villagers nodded as they heard Nfirea’s words. Since their family members had fled to the rendezvous point, they had to keep it secure too.

“All those who can’t use bows are already over there. Since you guys are strong, would it be all right for one of you to go over there?”

“We can’t do that.”

Jugem flatly refused Brita’s request.

He hadn’t done this out of malice toward the villagers whom he had lived and worked with. As the surging tension made Enri gulp, Jugem explained his position.

“There’s a lot of monsters. And there are others, in addition to the ogres. Splitting up would be very dangerous.”

“Do you have a clear picture of their numbers?”

“Brita-san, the enemy was lurking in the forest. There’s no way to accurately judge their numbers. However, we did manage to get an estimate… seven ogres, several giant snakes, several wargs, several somethings we think might be barghests and something big following behind them.”

“Wargs, giant snakes and ogres? Is there a druid behind them?”

Wargs were monsters that looked like wolves, but bigger. They were smarter than wolves and bad news if you encountered them in the forest.

“It’s very likely. Things will be really bad if they have a magic caster on their side. We can probably assume that they also have ranged attackers. So it would be better to marshal all our fighting power here, right? Should I call Obaa-chan over?”

“That… is hard to say, Ani-san. The rendezvous point is one of the strongest buildings in the village. If anything happens, it’ll be the final defensive line or in other words, the village’s keep. We can’t let anyone protecting that place leave.”

“…So we’ll be falling back as we fight, then? Where should I go?”

“Brita-san will direct the defense force. I hope you can relay my orders to them so they can understand. Then, act as the situation requires.”

“So we’ll use the second strategy against invaders, then? After feathering them with arrows, we’ll use barricades to keep them at bay while we stab them through the gaps with spears. Doesn’t matter how skilled our people are once they’re that close.”

“Ah, then I’ll leave that to you. However, wargs and barghests are very agile, and if left alone, they’ll cause a lot of damage. Target them first. Also, when their druid shows up, would you mind having the defense force go to the back line?"

"I'm not opposed to that, but will you have enough people on the front without us?"

"…If we're lucky, we'll be enough."

"If it's like that… as I thought, I'd better tell everyone here to be ready to die. At least, if we're in the back we won't be attacked, so we can concentrate fire on the druid. You know, I've been an adventurer, but this is the first time I've seen such brave villagers… at least, I thought that much when I watched them train with bows."

"In the past, the village was attacked… and we hated how useless we were."

Enri, who had been silent up till now, cut in with the sentiments of every member of the defense forces.

Amazingly, there was nobody here who wanted to flee. There was no way around this fight, no way they wouldn't protect their village for the loved ones hiding behind them.

"Speaking of which, such a large force must have taken some time to assemble. Does this mean they've been sent by the Giant of the East or the Serpent of the West?"

"That's not impossible."

Jugem softly confirmed Brita's suspicions.

If that was the case, it would mean Agu had drawn the monsters here. That was why Jugem had lowered his voice, so the defense force wouldn’t pick up on it and direct their aggression at Agu.

The existence of monsters like the Giant of the East, the Serpent of the West and their mutual enemy, the Beast of the South, had already been made known among the villagers.

Although the Beast had been tamed by the Dark Hero, the mighty monster’s form and presence had been etched indelibly on the villagers’ hearts. Fear was the appropriate response to the thought of fighting something on the same level as that.

“So what kind of magic does the Serpent of the West use? Damn, what a pain.”

Jugem nodded to Brita’s mumbling.

“Usually, monsters with innate spells won’t have more than ten of them, but if they can practice and learn magic they’ll have access to many more, which makes them troublesome. If they know magic for crossing obstacles…”

“It’s okay if it’s Enfi or the goblins, but magic-users are cheating bastards.”

Enri said so unhappily, which drew grim smiles from the villagers.

“…But don’t tell Gown-sama I said that, okay?”

That follow-up turned those smiles into laughs.

That should break the tension, Enri thought. Although it would be bad if they were too relaxed, being too tense would also keep them from fighting effectively. Now, the mood seemed about right.

Jugem looked thankfully at Enri. It seemed like he understood why she'd said what she'd said.

"Don't worry. Just stay behind and shoot. We'll handle the front."

The goblins had trained the defense force for precisely this role, which suited them best.

A small village would be hard-pressed to gather armor and weapons, and there simply weren't enough to arm the defense force. And in the end, they were still villagers. They might have strong arms from working the fields, but that didn't translate into sword skills. Anyone who could train himself into a warrior that could defeat monsters in their free time between chores would be nothing short of a genius.

With those points in mind, the goblins realized that they couldn't turn the defense force into frontliners. Instead, they decided to teach them archery to become the rear guard.

Although their technique had improved and they could hit their targets, their bows didn't have much penetrative power, making it difficult to strike a telling blow on thick-skinned monsters. However, if they were lucky and fired in unison, there was a chance they might hit a vulnerable spot.

"Alright, just like we trained, aim at the other side of the door, and fire in ranks! Agu, your task is to keep the main door from being broken down and stabbing them with spears. Treat Brita-san's commands as though they came from Ane-san and listen to her."

"Ohhh! Leave it to me!"

“That’s the spirit. Now, listen up. I forbid you to run. Fight until you die.”

“Of course! I’ll definitely repay the kindness you showed by saving me! In fact, why not put me at the frontline with the ogres?”

“You stupid kid! If I let you do that, you’d just end up killing yourself. You can say that once you get stronger!”

After being scolded by Jugem, Agu’s face was filled with regret and some of the defence force members went to comfort him.

Enri sighed in relief as she saw this. For one, the villagers didn’t see him as the one who had brought the monsters in. For another, it was proof that Agu was accepted by the villagers.

They were the last outsiders to arrive in the village. Although they weren’t shunned or treated badly, there was still a distance between them. However, from the look of things, that gap would vanish if they won today. It was ironic that the battlefield was the best place to build the bonds of camaraderie.

And it was because he felt that gap that Agu fought so fiercely. His objective was to contribute to the village and raise the standing of himself and his people. In human society, they would show respect to people who shed blood for them. Agu and his people had the welfare of his people in mind, so his passion was only natural.

“Enfi, I have something to ask of you.”

Enri stood beside Enfi, and whispered into his ear.

“Oh, no, further a little — ah. Mm. Got it. Then — Agu, I have something to entrust to you. Take these alchemical items and use them well.”

Enfi opened his satchel. Inside were many bottles and papers.

“Use these and throw them at the enemy. You’ll miss if you’re too far away, so try to use them at medium range. You ready?”

“Leave it to me! Watch me accomplish my mission perfectly!”

Agu accepted the satchel, and as they were waiting, one of the goblins shouted down to them.

“They’re on the move! They’re heading this way!”

If one were to listen, they could hear the sounds of the monsters rending the night.

“Defense force to your positions! Ane-san, watch out! Ani-san too!”

“Yes yes, I got it! Don’t any of you die, please!”

“Of course!”

“Now then, Enri, shall we?”

Nfirea ran up to Enri as her escort. Their job was to patrol the houses to see if anyone hadn’t noticed the emergency.

As they watched Enri leave, the goblins stood to battle stations.

“Self-defense force, to your places — and done. The enemy is entering the target area.”

There was no direct line of fire to the monsters on the other side of the wall. Shooting an unseen target would require firing in an arc, but that wasn’t something any amateur could do, and training to be able to do that would take too long. As a result, the goblins had decided to try something else.

They trained the defence force to land arrows on the other side of the wall. That meant learning how much force to use, and practicing the right angle to shoot at in order to accurately hit a specific area. It was training that was completely useless outside of very specific circumstances. However, since the enemy’s aim was to break down the gate and they were massed in front of it, single-mindedly attacking the gate, the training was very effective.

The main gate trembled under the fearsome cries of the monsters, and the nearby walls shuddered as well.

“Very good! Enemies are at the target area! Suppressive fire — begin!”

“Begin!”

In response to Jugem’s shout, the goblin archers on the watchtowers — Shuringan and Gurindai — began shooting. As long as their target was within their line of fire, the marksmen of the goblins would not miss. Screams of agony rose up from the other side of the door.

The defense force shuddered in fear and tension, as though they would be swallowed up by the air which was filled by the awful din of the battlefield. Amidst all this, Jugem shouted once more.

“Defence force — hold! Do not raise your bows until ordered!”

They were told not to shoot when the enemy had reached the place they had spent countless hours learning to shoot. However, in the next instant, everyone who looked at the towers understood why.

The monsters had started hurling rocks from the other side of the wall. Each one was about the size of a human head.

Although many went astray, even a lucky hit on the watchtowers made them shudder.

“Rock throwers confirmed! Enemy rock throwers have multiple rounds remaining!”

“Each one has about 3 rocks, and roughly 21 rocks in total — whoa!”

Another thrown rock struck a watchtower and the wood splintered.

If they began shooting, the defense force would become targets too.

It was true that the defense force was out of sight of the enemy, and their accuracy would be low. However, if they were unlucky, a single hit could kill people. Even a weakly-thrown rock could severely injure someone.

The order for the defense force not to attack could be said to be a safe strategy, because it showed that Jugem did not want anyone to die before the extended battle could commence.

“Don’t think we can’t hit you just because you’re throwing rocks at us!”

Gurindai shouted angrily, and began shooting again while weaving through the hail of flung rocks. The defence force burned his courageous form into their eyes, watching the way he fearlessly returned fire, knowing that he would be severely hurt if he was hit. However, Jugem was not watching him. He quickly scanned his surroundings and found new enemies in an instant.

“Kiumei! Climbing snakes on the left flank! You’ll be alright by yourself?”

“No problems, Leader! Leave it to me!”

Kiumei, who had been standing by in the rear, spurred his wolf forward. Ahead of him were the giant snakes climbing the wall.

“Fifteen, sixteen! You two hang on a bit more!”

There was no need for Jugem’s words. Not a hint of fear could be seen in the shooting stances of the two archers atop the listing watchtower. Not caring whether the tower would collapse under them, they continued targeting the monsters and baiting the rock attacks. On the left flank, Kiumei seemed to be doing well against the snakes.

Finally, the watchtower bent and broke under the barrage of thrown rocks. Shuringan and Gurindai jumped down to the ground, rolling several times to disperse the impact of their fall.

“Defense force archers ready!”

In response to the call, the archers prepared their bows.

“Breathe deep! In — out! In — Pull!”

This voice was just like their training, and for a moment, the defense force archers forgot they were on the battlefield. Ignoring the sound of the timbers creaking, they performed the same movements like they did during practice.

“Loose!”

Fourteen arrows traced beautiful arcs through the sky and vanished behind the wall, drawing more screams of pain from the monsters.

“Amazing,” Agu muttered to himself, but Jugem had no intention of giving anyone else the time to watch further.

“Second wave ready! — Don’t panic — Breathe deep! In — out! In — Pull!”

By this time, Shuringan and Gurindai had been healed and took their places by the defence force.

“Loose!”

Once again, fourteen arrows flew forth, followed slightly later by two more. The door creaked louder as the cries from the enemy intensified. The arrows must have gotten them mad — and made them hit harder.

“Back up! Change weapons!”

The defence force moved as a group behind the barricades positioned behind the main gate. Anyone charging in would be stuck on the sturdy bars and spikes of the obstacle. The arrangement was in an Lshape, leading the attackers to where Jugem and the ogres were waiting for them. For the intruders, breaking through the gate would be like jumping from the frying pan into the fire.

“If you see any magic casters, get out of their line of fire!”

“Leader!”

“What’s the matter, Agu?”

“Ani-san gave me some alchemical items and there’s glue in there, where do you want it?”

“Will it be absorbed by the mud?”

“Yes, but he said it would only shorten its effective duration.”

“If it’s like that, then wait for a good opportunity and jam up the entrance.”

After showing they understood, Agu and his tribesmen moved off as one. Kiumei returned after defeating the snakes and immediately headed off to the goblin cleric to receive healing.

There was the sound of wood splintering, and one side of the main gate was down. Enemy ogres surged through the breach.

“Kuku, a bunch of brainless fools.”

Jugem mocked the incoming enemies. They had made a fatal mistake.

The monsters had only broken down one side of the doors. Once that side was down, they ignored the other side and forced their way in, especially since they were afraid of being hit by arrows if they remained outside. However, with only one side of the door down, they could only come in one at a time, which meant a lot of enemies were stuck squeezing through the entrance. In addition, they would be caught in the angle of an L-shaped ambush, where all the defenders could focus their attacks on a small number of attackers at a time.

“Welcome to the kill zone. Time to die.”

The armed ogres on the village’s side would have an advantage in a slugging match against their wild counterparts, and the defence force had their spears to assist. Any ogres who tried to break down the palisades would be taken down by arrow fire, magic and Agu’s alchemical items. The goblins would handle any magical beasts who broke through amidst the chaos.

The tactical situation was overwhelmingly favourable to them and there were still the goblin wolf riders standing by in the rear. If the enemy didn’t have any magic casters, their victory would be assured. However—

“—What’s that?!” Panic crept into Jugem’s voice. “Is that a troll out there?”

It looked different from an ogre, but it was about the same size. It lurched stiffly toward the defenders, emitting an oppressive presence as it came. In its hand, it held a greatsword with an unnatural air about it.

A sticky substance flowed in the middle of the blade. That must be some form of magic.

“The boss took the field? …Could that be… the Giant of the East?”

It certainly looked that way. Its strong body looked like it had been trained until it was as hard as steel and it was completely unlike any of the trolls Jugem knew of. At a glance, he could see how it could be on par with the Beast of the South.

Just one troll would require all of the goblins to handle. It was an enemy that was tougher than any they had ever faced.

“If that’s the case…”

Jugem thought about what to do.

It seemed hopeless. The best way would be to cover Enri’s escape. If she didn’t want to, then even if they had to force her—

“…No, that’s not the best way. That’s the worst way, and our last resort.”

Having given up on that course of action, Jugem spoke to his goblin troops.

“…Oi, you lot. Afterwards, every single one of us is going to die. Don’t even think about childish things like falling back. Make sure you brand your heroic deaths into everyone’s eyes!”

The goblins answered with a roar full of fighting spirit. In an instant, enemies and allies alike seemed to freeze.

“Here we go, lads! Let’s show them the power of Ane-san’s boys!”

♦♦♦

After a circuit of the village, Enri confirmed that nobody was left behind and breathed a sigh of relief. Just then, the sound of something breaking came from the front. It was followed by battle cries from both sides and the resounding deep bass sound made her shudder.

That was probably the sound of the gate breaking and the goblins joining battle. She nearly threw up from stress, but Enri forced it back down. The bitter taste remained in her mouth, but she ignored it to look at Nfirea.

“Enfi. We should be heading to the gate.”

“Understood. But you need to go to the rendezvous point and calm everyone down, okay?”

Enfi’s words had the subtext of *don’t get in everyone else’s way*.

Although Enri had been trained in the use of a bow, now that the gate had been broken, the battle would have moved into close quarters. To be honest, even if Enri went there now, there wasn’t much she could do.

“I can’t do that. I chose to lead the goblins and the villagers, and as long as I’m able, I need to do that. Although falling back is the correct thing to do, it’s not the right thing to do.”

She had to stand on the frontlines and see how the battle was fought. After seeing the conviction in Enri’s eyes, Enfi hardened his features and nodded.

“That’s true. I understand. I’ll protect you.”

The serious expression on her childhood friend’s usually placid face made Enri’s heart beat in strange and wondrous ways.

“Mm? What’s wrong, Enri? I know, I’m not as cool as Gown-san, but I won’t let you die.”

“…Don’t say die.”

“Ah, I’m sorry. That… that…”

As she saw her childhood friend struggle for the words to use, like he always did, Enri smiled.

“Let’s go, Enfi!”

“Ah, yes! That’s right, we don’t have time to waste on talking!”

The two of them ran to the front gate. Because they’d started running from the rear gate, which was furthest away, even if they ran at top speed, it would take them a while to get there. And with them panting for breath, there was no way they could start fighting right away. In order not to let haste make waste, they proceeded at a moderate speed.

However, they only ran for a few seconds.

The two of them heard a stomach-churning sound and halted in their tracks.

Looking back, they saw someone watching them from above and behind.

It was abnormally huge, far larger than a human being. They couldn’t comprehend it in the moment that they saw it, but that was its true form. It had a hand on the rear gate, which stood four meters tall.

“—That, what’s that? A giant?”

“I don’t know! Ah—”

Nfirea’s words cut off halfway, and his mouth hung open. Enri frantically turned to look at what had stunned him and ended up making the same expression.

Something was slowly climbing the wall.

Something which was far too large to be a human being.

“Could that be a troll?”

As she heard Nfirea breathing those words, Enri stared at the emerging monster.

“What’s that?”

“Although it’s the first time I’ve seen one, it’s exactly like how I’ve heard it would be. If that’s really a troll we’re in trouble… Trolls are opponents that even gold-ranked adventurers would have trouble beating. Honestly speaking, Jugem and the others would probably have a hard time.”

Enri felt the blood drain downward as she heard about something that was stronger than the mightiest being in the village.

The troll that was revealing its massive silhouette snorted, and it started looking around its surroundings.

Grabbing Enri by the hand, Nfirea dragged her into the shadows of a nearby house. Here, he closed his mouth and whispered directly into her ear at a barely audible volume.

“Enri, trolls have very sensitive noses. It is okay for now since we’re downwind, but it’s too soon to rest easy. You need to get out of here… then meet up with the goblins.”

Enri drew closer to Nfirea and whispered back into his ear.

“I can’t, Enfi. If we let that guy go to the main gate, everyone will die in the pincer attack.”

“That might be the case, but right now, we can’t—”

“—We’re the only ones here. That means it’s up to us to stop it.”

Between the gap in his hair, Nfirea’s eyes looked at Enri like he’d just seen a crazy person. Granted, Enri did realize she’d just asked him and herself to do the impossible, but to be honest, there was no other way.

“We don’t need to win or defeat it. We just need to delay it. Enfi, please lend me your strength.”

“—How are we going to delay it? Lure that guy away from here? I suppose I could fight it directly… but I doubt I could take even a single hit from him.”

Nfirea’s calm words revealed a calm determination inside him. In response, Enri laid out her plan.

“I’ve got a plan. For starters, let’s make some ogres.”

♦ ♦ ♦

The troll stared briefly at a wooden, human-made house and made its move.

That was because it thought all the houses had the smell of soft, delicious humans, but that was just leftover scent. After confirming there were no other scents in the area, it began striding toward the direction where the sound of battle was coming from. The sound of humans fighting its brethren made it drool non-stop, and in its mind, it thought of the humans that would be there.

A soft, lovely feast of human flesh.

As a connoisseur among trolls, it loved the meaty limbs and disliked the bitter torso. Therefore, it was rare that it could eat its fill, but now it looked like it would get the chance to do just that.

Its strides grew longer and it started to drool in anticipation.

However, the troll halted and looked carefully around its surroundings. Or rather, he looked into the shadows of a nearby house.

There were ogres.

The smell of ogres was wafting out from there.

It frowned. Although ogres were its allies, there was a slight difference in the scent it was picking up. It was one of which he had no prior memory. And now it was coming from all around him.

Of course it didn’t come to this conclusion because its nose was as sensitive as a bloodhound’s but because it had remembered the unique odor of its ogre allies. As such, it didn’t know how many ogres there were.

And that brought up a question. There was a strange smell here as well, like the smell of crushed grass, but far stronger.

Had an ogre shredded grass and smeared itself with the juices?

It pondered this question and found confusion. The strong herbal odor stung its nose, and its tears were about to flow. If the ogres could endure this stench, it must have been because they had a bad sense of smell.

It could take them on face to face. As a troll, it was much stronger than any ogre. However, that didn’t mean it could escape unscathed, and it would take time to deal with them.

Because trolls had the natural ability to regenerate, their wounds would recover over time. However, regenerating its injuries would still take a while, which was troublesome. Who knew, its fellow ogres might have eaten all the humans by the time it got there.

Then, since the opposition had dispersed, as long as it moved straight ahead, they would all come out to attack it.

It felt a glimmer of pride at seeing through its opponents and slowly began moving again.

It would destroy them all in a short time. Thus, the fact that its opponents had split up was a golden opportunity. All it needed to do was slay the ogres one by one.

It moved slowly, taking care not to make noise, but suddenly, a small shadow dashed out of a nearby house.

It wasn’t a goblin, but one of its favorite prey, humans.

In contrast to the troll who had been surprised into inaction, the caped human splashed something on it…

“Uguooooaaaahhh!”

The troll screamed from the overpowering stench. Just by smelling the odor of the green stuff, the powerful stink burrowed into its nose and sinuses. This reek was several times stronger than that of the grass-stained ogres.

Even though it could regenerate, this was not a wound it could heal. It simply could not endure the smell. Its eyes watered and it took a step toward the human, but it had already run back into the house.

The reason why the human had managed to get so close despite the troll’s keen sense of smell was because the human’s scent had been masked by the scent of the crushed grass.

Angered by the loss of its target, the troll returned to its earlier target — the ogres. First, it would kill the ogres and then find that tantalizing bait, the troll thought.

The troll, thrashing around the outside of the house in a fury, didn’t find any signs of the ogres. It was as though they’d vanished into thin air.

“Guuuuu, where?”

Looking around, it still couldn’t find the ogres, which were still large despite being smaller than itself. No matter how those ogres moved, it should have seen them eventually. Could those puny ogres use invisibility, like their master? The troll had encountered another situation it could not figure out and snorted.

However, the strong stink of herbs rising from its own body interfered with its sense of smell, and it could not follow the ogres’ scent trail.

“Guuuuuuuuuu…”

The moaning troll scraped experimentally at the fluid on its body. This time, its fingers stank. Glancing around, the troll found a fallen piece of cloth on the ground.

The troll considered that it might be good to wipe itself off with the cloth and picked it up with a curious expression on its face. It brought the cloth to its nose and sniffed, but because its nose still wasn’t fully recovered yet, it could only get a bit of scent.

The troll smelled ogre on the cloth, and suddenly, it understood.

It had mistaken this cloth that reeked of ogre-stink for an ogre itself.

This was not a coincidence.

“Humans!”

Roaring angrily, the troll started tearing up its surroundings. No humans. Then they should still be in their homes.

The troll’s fist pounded angrily at a nearby house and after hammering at it several times, it reached up to tear the roof off, intent on destroying the interior.

A human rushed out in a panic as it was demolishing the house. Eager to tear the human apart as well, it gave chase.

♦ ♦ ♦

The target was chasing her. That meant the plan was working. Though she was grateful for that, her heart was still pounding and she wanted to cry. A gigantic, man-eating monster was pressing in from behind, and this high-stakes game of tag — if she lost, she would disappear down that monster’s throat — was something any ordinary village girl would cry about.

The fact that she didn’t know how long she’d have to play this game made her want to cry even more.

If she knew when it would be over, she might be able to will herself to keep fleeing until the last moment. However, without knowing when the battle at the gate would be over, without knowing when the others could come and help her, she was filled with uneasiness, which diminished her strength.

Enri regretted not sending someone over to the main gate to make a report, but the preparations had taken too long.

She ran with all her strength, rushing into the house where Nfirea was waiting. In turn, Nfirea rushed out of the back door, wearing the same cape and robe that she was.

Enri held her breath, gulping and hoping that the enemy hadn’t seen through their scheme. The troll continued chasing Nfirea, not having noticed the switch.

She calmed her ragged breathing and clasped her hands in delight.

Trolls were far superior to humans in strength, stride length and physical ability, therefore a single person running away would definitely be caught. In order to recover stamina for extended periods of movement, they decided to switch with each other without letting the enemy notice. This was intended to draw out the chase, and also to keep it from going to the rendezvous point where the people were.

The question, then, was how to deceive it.

How could trolls tell humans apart? Maybe if they lived together long enough they would have a few ways, but this was not nearly long enough. Practically speaking, it would be by appearance, especially clothing. As such, Nfirea and Enri had worn the same rain capes and ponchos.

Next, they had to keep it from differentiating between the two of them via its sense of smell, and the herbal juice was meant to take care of its keen nose.

Enri had prepared two traps based on scent — one was to use the ogre-stink to halt it in its tracks, and the other was using the stench of the herbs to disorient it.

After she got her breathing under control. Enri began stealthily moving to the next house.

She crept into the darkened interior of the house, peeking at the situation outside. With a ‘*dong*’ sound, Nfirea ran inside. At this moment, Enri ran out again from the back door by which she had entered.

But then Enri realised that the troll wasn’t following her, even though she had run out of the house.

The troll snorted and looked at Enri and the house. Its ugly face contorted even further. She guessed that the look on its face might be surprise.

Cold sweat beaded on Enri’s throat. She touched herself unconsciously, and her hand came away, sticky and wet.

“…Its nose is used to it?”

After getting used to the smell of the herbs, and smelling the fear in her sweat, the troll seemed to have realised that there were two humans.

The troll raised its hand and smashed it deeply into the house. Nfirea ran out again. However, his footsteps stopped, and he didn’t look like he was going to flee.

“Enri! Run away! I’ll buy you some time!”

“—Idiot! Run with me!”

“It’ll definitely catch up with us! Even if we use the houses as shields!”

The wide-eyed Enri saw Nfirea smiling.

“I’m stronger, so there’s a higher chance I’ll survive if you leave me behind!”

Nfirea cast a spell, and his body was enveloped in a bubble of soft, gentle light.

He continued smiling to Enri, who had lost the power of speech.

“And besides — I want to protect the woman I love.”

Nfirea turned toward the ferocious monster, raising his fist and pointing his thumb to himself.

“Come on, big guy, I’ll play with you! Come have a go if you’re hard enough! 「Acid Arrow」!”

Nfirea kept taunting the troll, while firing a green arrow of acid at it. As it hit, steam rose with the sound of hissing and bubbling, making the troll scream in agony.

The troll fixed its rage-maddened eyes on Nfirea. It paid no more attention to Enri.

“Go! Go and get help!”

It would be foolish to waste time here.

“—You’d better stay safe!”

Saying that, Enri ran.

The troll didn’t look like it wanted to follow.

Frankly speaking, his chances of survival were zero. There was an overwhelming difference in their respective physical capabilities. And there was no way he could triumph over a foe that needed gold-ranked adventurers to beat.

It was a hopeless battle, and being able to hold on for even a minute was worthy of praise.

“Yup, I’m going to die.”

Nfirea smiled bitterly as he watched the troll, who was approaching him warily.

It could not regenerate damage caused by acid and fire. Because of this, the troll was especially careful around Nfirea, who could defeat its greatest ability. It was laughable that it had to act so cautiously around a foe it could finish off in one blow.

“Well, that works for me. 「Hypnotism」!”

The troll’s hostility seemed unchanged. It seemed to have resisted the spell.

Realizing that it had been targeted by a spell, the troll charged.

The gigantic body approaching him was like a scene out of a nightmare.

“If it worked, I could have held on a bit longer… no such luck. Ahhh, what a shame.”

Nfirea seemed to have given up. This was because it was a completely unwinnable battle, which had crossed the line from bravery to recklessness. But even so—

—He had to buy time for Enri.

With that thought in mind, Nfirea leapt into action.

Making note of the troll’s upraised left arm, he ran forward and to the left. Seeking life in death, he plunged head-first into danger to reach the safety beyond it. The troll’s fist followed him, and the wind of its passing ruffled his hair. And in front of Nfirea, a mighty foot kicked out at him like a moving wall.

Nfirea’s vision spun wildly as he flew through the air, his body making cracking sounds like shattered tree branches.

He hit the ground hard and rolled several times, like a piece of discarded rubbish.

Pain coursed through Nfirea’s body, which was still rolling over the ground. He was in more pain than he’d ever been in his life.

“No, I somehow managed to survive. That’s amazing. I’m amazing…”

This was because of the effects of his defensive spell and the fact that the troll had been unable to kick with all its strength. Ignoring the pain that shot through him with every breath he took, Nfirea stood, and loosed another spell.

“「Acid Arrow」!”

The pursuing troll stopped in its tracks, wary of the pool of scorching acid at its feet.

Mmm, just as planned.

Nfirea’s aim was to buy time. If the enemy stopped attacking and went on guard, he hoped it would continue to stay that way.

“…Damn, this hurts. I don’t want to die…”

Nfirea gave voice to his despair.

In the end, this was all his life had amounted to.

He didn’t want to face this fact, but the circumstances were forcing him to acknowledge it.

He would die here. There was no doubt that his existence would end here.

He wanted to run. Maybe if he ran with all his strength he might be able to escape. But if that happened, what manner of tragedies would occur?

Nfirea thought of Enri.

He was able to fight because he had Enri.

“So I told her after all… damn. I don’t want to die before I hear her answer.”

The ever-approaching troll could not understand what the young man was feeling.

And he couldn’t delay it any longer.

He didn’t know how, but Nfirea managed to read his opponent’s thoughts through its face. It was planning to kill him, even if it got hurt. If that was the case—

“「Acid Arrow」!”

All Nfirea could do was wound the troll, in order to make things easier for his allies who would face the troll after him.

The troll raised its fist, face twisted from the pain of being burnt by the acid. Nfirea, who couldn’t even stand without being wracked with pain, was unable to muster any form of defense.

♦♦♦

“Hurry!”

In response to Enri’s command, the three goblins ran to save Nfirea.

The reason they had met up wasn’t because Enri had reached the main gate, but rather, because Enri had not returned, and the howls coming from the rear had worried Jugem enough that he had sent three goblins out to investigate.

If he could just hold on, the goblins would save him. This was what Enri thought, as her heart was shredded by guilt.

This was really a stroke of bad luck.

If it hadn’t been like this—

“There!”

Enri was pointing to Nfirea, in front of them. And towering over him, the troll was raising its fist.

They couldn’t reach him. The distance was just too far.

The troll’s hand fell like a thunderbolt. It could destroy a house in a single blow. Nfirea was dead beyond all reasonable doubt.

As she closed her eyes, she heard the goblins gulp in surprise.

Their out-of-place response led Enri to nervously open her eyes—

“Aaaahhhh, your HP’s in the red~ You okay?”

—And she saw a beautiful woman holding a gigantic weapon.

Lupusregina was carrying a weapon that looked like some sort of oversized religious symbol, using it like a shield to block the troll’s fist. The weapon’s dimensions and the maid’s size seemed completely mismatched to the point of surreality, but this was no illusion.

“Then, I’ll take care of this guy. …Oh wait, Enfi-chan’s hurt. 「Heal」.”

The troll stepped back, unable to understand the scene before it. The blow which it had put its full strength into had been blocked by a human, so its reaction was only to be expected. Perhaps it thought there was some kind of magic at work here.

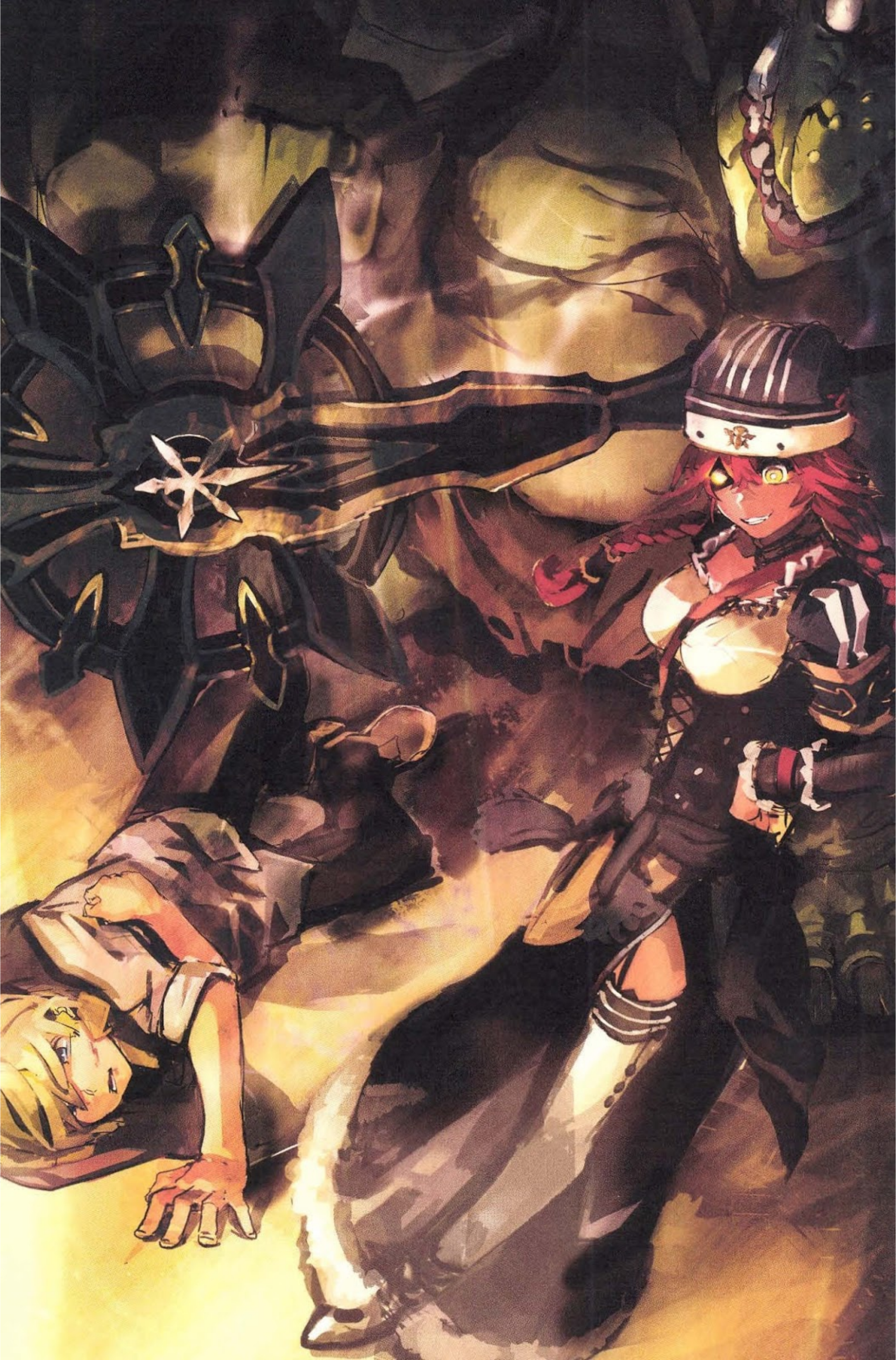
With a stunned expression, Enfi limped away from the troll, turning his back to it. It was a thoroughly unguarded posture, but the troll didn’t press the attack. No, it couldn’t just ignore the newcomer.

“Enfi!”

Enri hugged Nfirea tightly.

“Ah, it’s Enri.”

His dreamlike reply told Enri that he was at his limit. Although he was out of danger, he was still in shock.



“I’m glad you’re alright.”

“—Y-you too.”

Enri felt something warm inside her heart. It was a warmth that replaced the cold that ran through her when she thought Nfirea had died.

“Really, I’m happy you’re fine!”

Enri hugged Nfirea tightly, with all her strength.

“So am I.”

Nfirea reached out his arms to hug Enri in return. Although the hug was very tight, they both felt safe within each other's arms.

Enri’s tears welled up and spilled out, streaming down her face.

“What’s wrong?”

“…Idiot.”

“Ahhhh~ Sorry to interrupt you two while you’re making out.”

“Lupusregina-san!

Enri let the strength flow from her arms, and at the same time Nfirea loosened his grip. Feeling slightly disappointed, they both turned to Lupusregina.

“The troll—”

Shifting her line of sight, Enri saw something which was hard to describe.

“Ah, this? Kinda looks like a hamburger patty, doesn’t it? All it needs is a good charbroiling.”

A mass of blood-spattered meat shifted and twitched under the bloodied head of Lupus’ crozier. There was nothing about the pile of broken flesh that suggested that it had once been a troll. However, what made it disgusting was the fact that it was still regenerating, and still breathing.

“Ahhh well~ it’s good you two are fine. Then I guess I can clean things up here too.”

Enri heard the voices of the goblins approaching. It seemed like the battle for the main gate had been won.

“There you go~”

Fire descended from the heavens, and a pillar of red light engulfed the troll, producing the stench of cooked meat.

“Now then, the matter of the troll’s settled, so I’ll be taking off. Ah, Enfi-chan, Ainz-sama wants to reward you for developing the purple potion, so he invited you to his house. Hope you’ve prepared yourself~ Or should I say, any last words?”

After saying that, Lupusregina left through the back door.

“Thank you very much!”

Lupusregina didn’t stop or turn back in response to Enri’s shouted thanks, only waved her hand.

“…Ane-san, Ani-san, we’ll take over the task of guiding the others. You two should go have some rest over there.”

Without waiting for a reply, the goblins started moving. *Shouldn’t they leave someone with us,* Enri thought, but she was more worried for Nfirea than that, and put a hand on his shoulder.

After leaving the corpse of the troll behind, the two of them sat down.

“Haaaa.”

Their sighs of relief overlapped each other. Then, the two of them raised their eyes to look at the night sky.

“She saved you.”

“Mmm.”

“It was just good luck.”

“Mmm.”

“Don’t do that again.”

“Mmm.”

Silence flowed between the two of them. Enri suddenly spoke the words in her heart.

“I don’t know whether or not this is love, but I don’t want Enfi to go anywhere.”

“…Mmm. …Mmm.”

“Is this love?”

“…I don’t know. But if it is, I’d be very happy.”

Enri and Nfirea sat silently like this, leaning shoulder to shoulder and watching the stars until the goblins arrived—

EPILOGUE

“Ane-san, looks like you’re ready.”

Jugem commented on Enri’s appearance as he entered her home.

“Yes, that’s right… is it odd?”

Enri asked Jugem while looking down at the dress she was wearing — one of the best she had, which she usually reserved for the harvest festival.

“Not at all, don’t you think, Ani-san?”

“Mm. You’re very pretty, Enri.”

“Ahhh, really now!”

With a red face, Enri stared at Jugem and a smiling Nemu. Or rather, at Nemu's mischievous grin.

Ever since Enri and Nfirea’s relationship had taken a step forward, she wanted to call out Nemu’s transient facial expressions as they came, but Enri knew that would just embarrass herself more and wisely kept her mouth shut.

However, leaving it alone was dangerous too. Especially for Nemu.

Sometimes, her little sister would ask questions that she couldn’t answer.

I keep thinking that over the past few days, I’ve matured mentally… maybe I *should ask Enfi for help for this…*

Seeing the plea in Enri's eyes, her lover spoke.

"Umm, ahem! Speaking of which, Jugem-san, can you use that magic sword well? I heard it's not like normal swords, and using it is tiring."

The greatsword Jugem was holding had been obtained in the raid several days ago.

"I've gotten used to the sword's weight and center of gravity, so I can use it as well as my old sword. As expected of a magic weapon, its sharpness and so on are much better than the other one. However… the poison in here, it weakens its opponent's strength, but it's a bit strange…"

"It is? Is it a powerful effect?"

"Well, it's not a particularly strong poison. Someone like me can resist it easily. However, against weaker opponents…"

Jugem's face took on a dark expression.

"What's wrong?"

"Ah—" Jugem said as he looked to the ceiling, speaking in an irritated voice. "I was thinking about the troll I got this sword from, he seemed like an odd fellow."

"The corpse doesn't seem any different from a normal troll. Maybe it was a subrace?"

"No, no, I didn't mean that, Ani-san. From its movements, its lack of regeneration, the way it felt when I cut into it… it felt weird… that's right, like a body that was already dead. Something bizarre and foreboding like that."

"A moving corpse? Like a zombie?"

"I don't know. There might be a species of troll like that—"

"—Thanks for waiting!"

The door opened in time with that fresh and bright proclamation.

With the sun at her back, Lupusregina strolled boldly into Enri's house. As Enri and friends watched in stunned silence, a *pang* sound came from the top of Lupusregina's head.

"Owie~"

"You idiot. How could you be so rude? Everyone, I apologize on her behalf."

After pulling Lupusregina back, the woman in the back bowed to them.

"I am Ainz-sama's maid, Yuri Alpha. I am here to receive Nfirea-sama, Enri-sama and Nemu-sama. Will you permit us entry?"

"Ah, yes. Please come in, Lupusregina too."

The woman who had entered with Lupusregina had an otherworldly beauty, just like Lupusregina.

"Then, once you're ready, we can begin the teleportation straight away."

“Te-teleportation? You can teleport?!”

Nfirea was practically shouting. Although Enri didn’t know why Nfirea was so surprised, she could guess that it was a big deal.

Was teleporting the Warrior-Chief and the others a big deal too?

“Ah, no. This is not my power, but the power of a magic item Ainz-sama gave me.”

“…The horn, the potions too. He’s amazing. Why is he so amazing?”

Nfirea’s shoulder sagged. Sensing an opportunity, Enri decided to ask a question.

“Then, is it really all right for me to go? And my little sister too!”

Today was the day that the village’s savior, Ainz Ooal Gown, had invited Nfirea to his home. However, she felt unease when she heard that even a mere village girl like herself could go along. Their host was a powerful magic caster, and they were people who lived in completely different worlds. The idea that she might accidentally do something rude made her stomach hurt.

“It’s cool~ since we’re celebrating Enfi-chan’s new invention, his girlfriend En-chan can come along, no problem. Ainz-sama said so too, yanno. Formality’s not such a big deal.”

“…Lupus, mind your tone.”

“Yuri-nee, what’s wrong with that? We’re friends, right? En-chan~”

“Eh? Ah, yes. Yes. Just like that. Mm.”

Yuri sighed with a ‘Haaa…’, then walked to the front of a nearby wall. Suddenly, as though erupting from some form of space, a gigantic wooden closet appeared. It was big enough for people to pass through with ease, and its exterior was intricately carved, so it looked like a decorative closet.

“…Could this be a ‘pocket space’? No, this is too big, it should be a higher tiered spell.”

“Come, please, step inside. Lupus, can I trust the safety of this place to you?”

“Understood su~”

The wooden cabinet should have been backed up against a wall, but when one looked inside, its interior seemed to stretch into another world.

Yuri took the first step and walked through to the other side of the closet.

She was followed by Nfirea, and a little bit later, by Enri holding onto Nemu’s hand.

They passed through the wall ahead of them without resistance, and found themselves inside a vast, grand pathway, flanked by statues on both sides that were so life-like it seemed like they might even move.

“Uwah~”

Nemu exclaimed softly as she looked around the ceiling, her mouth as wide as her eyes. In order to keep her from falling, Enri looked forward as well.

“Amazing…”

The floor was made of polished rock, on which a colorful carpet had been laid to show the way forward. Enri was struck dumb with admiration; she imagined that this must be what palaces looked like.

“Please, walk this way.”

Yuri’s voice snapped her out of her daze, and she thought of running a little to catch up with the two people ahead of them. But since that would be entirely unbefitting of a place like this, Enri merely quickened her footsteps to advance swiftly.

After walking for a distance, a wall appeared with a closet door upon it, similar to the one they had used to enter. However, there were two key differences. The first was that this door was several times larger than the first, big enough for several people to enter at the same time. The second was because an image of the other side was projected onto the door, and a multicolored film of magic opened up inside it.

“Then, please enter like you did previously.”

Enri and Nfirea looked at each other.

“We’ll go in together.”

Enri and Nfirea linked their hands. From left to right stood Nemu, Enri and Nfirea, and together they walked into the door.

In an instant, amidst a shower of pink petals, there was a vision of a woman in clothes which were red on top and white below—

“Welcome~”

A harmonious chorus of voices greeted them.

Looking around, they had arrived in an even more luxurious hallway, with two rows of astoundingly beautiful maids flanking them on both sides. At the end of a passage stood a man in a black robe that seemed to suck in all light from around him, wearing a bizarre mask. He was the savior of the village, Ainz Ooal Gown.

A panicked Enri froze where she stood.

The chandeliers on the ceiling sparkled, and the white marble floor was spotless.

A magnificent passage and pretty maids all in two rows. It was like walking into a fantasy world.

Lost in this ephemeral, dream-like world, Enri accidentally lost her grip on Nemu’s hand. The part of her mind that wasn’t completely overwhelmed by her surrounding recognized this, and in the next moment, Enri snapped back to reality.

Nemu ran ahead.

“Amazing! It’s so amazing!”

Nemu shouted at the top of her voice as she ran. She ran down the two lines of maids, and towards Ainz.

Faced with a world that overwhelmed her senses and heart, she abandoned her restraint and let herself run wild.

“It’s super duper amazing!”

“Nemu! Come back!”

Enri started running a fraction of a second later. Nemu’s disgraceful behavior was making sweat form all over Enri’s body.

But was it really all right for a mere village girl like herself to run in a divine realm like this, flanked by beautiful maids? Enri hesitated, and her feet betrayed the conflicting emotions in her. In the end, she ended up moving like a half-dead frog, starting and stopping, her mind running through all the worst-case scenarios that could result.

While Enri was still limping along, Nemu had already reached the side of the village’s savior without resistance.

“Is it that impressive?”

“Yup! It’s really amazing!”

“Is that so? Amazing… no, perhaps that’s true.”

Ainz reached out a hand, and calmly patted Nemu on the head.

“Is the place where I live truly that wonderful?”

“Yeah, it’s really wonderful! Did you make this, Gown-sama?”

“Hahaha, yes, that’s right. My friends and I did.”

“That’s amazing! Gown-sama and Gown-sama’s friends are all amazing!”

“Hah! Hahahaha!”

The clear and bright laughter reverberated through the hallway.
By this time, Nfirea and Enri had hesitantly reached the two of them.
Enri tightly gripped Nemu’s hand, infused with a will that would never let go.

“We thank you for your kind invitation from the bottom of our hearts!”

“There is no need for such formality. We are here to celebrate the production of your new potion. Be at ease.”

“Gown-sama, I am truly sorry. My sister Nemu has been rude to you.”

“Really, think nothing of it. She was moved by the sight of my residence, was she not? Then that is no insult to me.”

Ainz seemed to be in a good mood as he replied.

“Then… next up, I intended to speak to Nfirea-kun… Nemu, how about it? Do you want to see the home that I, no, that we created together?”

“Yes! I wanna see! I want to see the amazing house Gown-sama and his friends made!”

Nemu spoke before Enri could refuse.

“Hahaha. Very well, very well! I have such sights to show you…”

Enri was unable to speak, once she saw the good mood Ainz was in.

◆◆◆

She settled down onto a recliner, remembering that she had been asked to wait in the receiving room while Nemu was shown around.

Rather than say she was invited here, it would be more accurate to say that she was like a small animal that had been taken from its nest. She sat uneasily, and looked around herself. Beside her — regardless of the size of this place, the two of them stuck closely to each other — her lover Nfirea was also unable to keep still, much like a small animal himself.

Enri could understand that her village’s savior, the magic caster known as Ainz Ooal Gown, was a mighty being, but what she had seen today went beyond her wildest imaginings.

It was as though she had stepped into a shining dreamscape, or a story where princesses and other great figures took center stage.

The fireplace was decorated with glass birds that had been carved to life-like perfection. If she broke one, she could work her entire life and still be unable to pay for it.

The sofa was exquisite, and Enri wondered if she was dirtying it with her clothes.

The chandelier, the first she had seen in her short life, was not lit by torches, lanterns, or candles, but by magic instead. She had seen magic lights before in E-Rantel’s Adventurer’s Guild, but they couldn’t compare in brightness or style.

The furniture was tasteful and luxurious. Of particular interest was the weightiness of the ebony table before her. Even though Enri had no idea how valuable these kinds of things were, she was still able to tell that this was a very valuable piece.

A lifelike portrait of a beautiful woman hung on the wall, painted in intricate detail.

Even the carpet on the floor made Enri hesitate to step on it. It was so soft that while sitting on the sofa, she gently raised her feet, thinking that it would be better not to let her feet touch the floor.

Enri was so nervous that she was about to faint.

“I knew we should have gone with her.”

Although Ainz had refused, the idea of Nemu going by herself made her stomach boil in anxiety.

“I just hope she doesn’t trouble Gown-sama…”

“It’ll be fine, don’t worry. Gown-sama is very accommodating. I think he’ll overlook any minor rudeness from a young girl.”

“Mm, but, you see, if you anger a noble, you’ll be executed…”

“I’ve heard that too, but to be honest, I’ve never seen it before. E-Rantel and its surrounding territory are administered by the king himself, so I don’t think the nobles would dare to make a fuss… Is Gown-sama a noble?”

“Isn’t he? Anyone with such a luxurious manor and so many pretty maids would have to be a noble, right? There’s no way they could gather all these things otherwise.”

“Mmm? Is that so? To be honest, I don’t think even a noble could assemble beautiful maids like these.”

Enri’s eyebrows shot up at a dangerous angle.

It was fine if she said the maids were pretty, but when Nfirea said it, it made her feel uneasy. Just as she turned a sharp gaze on Nfirea — there was a knocking on the door.

“Eee!”

Enri’s shoulders twitched violently, and because the two of them were pressed against each other, the twitch was transmitted to Nfirea, who shuddered as well.

The knocking came again. Enri frantically thought about what the knocking meant, and in the meantime Nfirea opened his mouth.

“Ah, that, please come in.”

“My apologies.”

The way Nfirea had given the right answer with such calm mystified Enri, and what entered was a maid pushing a silver cart. She was a beautiful woman, dressed in sparkling clean and spotless clothes which even an amateur could recognize as a high-class maid outfit. A gentle, warm smile adorned her face. However, Enri was worried that at any moment it would twist into an angry expression as she exclaimed, “What are you two doing!”

“—The beverages are ready.”

“N-no need!”

The maid’s face displayed stunned confusion for a moment as she parsed Enri’s lightning-fast answer. Then she turned her gaze to Nfirea, and then back to Enri.

“…Ah, will this be all right?”

“Ah, yes.”

Perhaps she sensed how Enri was so tense that her body had frozen up, or Nfirea’s innate nervousness, but the maid smiled, genuine and unforced. She said a simple “My apologies”, and sat herself down beside Enri. Then she gently placed a hand on the petrified Enri’s shoulder.

“Emmot-sama, please do not be so tense. Emmot-sama and Bareare-sama are guests, all you need to do is be at ease and relax.”

“But, but… w-what if we break something in here…”

“Do not worry. Ainz-sama will not be bothered even if the objects in here are damaged.”

“But, but how? All the things in here are…”

Even thinking about the cost of the things she could see in a quick glance around the room made her head hurt. And to think, these items weren’t a big deal?

“Yes, Ainz-sama is extremely wealthy.”

“Tha-that I know.”

After all, he was the kind of man who would freely give out valuable and potent items such as those horns.

“Which is why, please be at ease. Deliberate damage aside, Ainz-sama will smile and forgive you for any accidents. And even if anything is damaged, it can be repaired with magic.”

“Even if you say that, that…”

“I understand. Then, please have a drink. That way, you’ll be able to relax.”

“But…”

Enri glanced at the tea service on the silver pushcart. They were made of exquisite porcelain, edged in gold, and the reverse side was a deep blue, patterned with intricate designs. And they looked fragile enough that Enri was worried that they would break the moment she touched them.

“Enri, have a drink. It would be rude to refuse further.”

“Ah, then, that one, thank you.”

“Understood… hm, I see. The fragrance and taste of herbal tea is an acquired taste. Would you rather have traditional black tea instead?”

“Yes, please, thank you.”

The smiling maid prepared the tea for them with flowing, elegant movements. After the cups were rinsed with hot water, in a mysterious and inexplicable way, she made the tea before the two of them. In addition, two different small sized cups were placed in front of them.

“Please add the desired amounts of milk and sugar to your tastes.”

Enri opened the sugar pot. What she saw were white solids that resembled nothing so much as powdered snow. The village girl mechanically deposited several sugar cubes into her cup, stirring them until they dissolved. After that, she added milk. Then, Enri took a sip, and felt like her face was going to melt.

“S-sweet!”

“Mm, I guess adding the sugar would do that. It’s not often that you get to taste sweet things in the village, and you don’t raise bees… if I’m not wrong, you only have something like syrup? I remember there was spice-making magic but that’s something else entirely…”

Forgetting where she was, Enri exclaimed loudly.

“Try your hardest to recall it.”

Before she could hear his noises of acknowledgement, Enri took another mouthful of the red tea, and the taste let her heart calm down.

“Really, it’s sweet and delicious.”

At this moment, several knocks resounded from the door. The maid moved quietly over and opened it.

“Ainz-sama and your little sister have returned.”

As the door opened, Nemu rushed in, all smiles. Ainz followed behind her.

“Nee-san! It’s amazing! It’s shiny and pretty and really amazing!”

As Nemu hugged her sister around the waist, Enri rose to bow to Ainz, all the while taking care to not let her little sister’s feet dirty the floor.

“Gown-sama! I apologize for my little sister’s rudeness!”

“Certainly not. Rather, I should apologize for keeping her for so long.”

“There’s no such thing. We’re very grateful.”

Ainz waved his hand to indicate that it wasn’t a problem.

“Then before I discuss matters with Nfirea-kun, let us eat.”

“Eh? We’re imposing too much—”

Facing the panicking Nfirea, Ainz replied with a calming gesture.

“This is to make sure the transaction with Nfirea-kun is profitable.”

“What do you mean by transaction?”

“…I’ll explain before we eat.”

Ainz sat on the other side of the sofa.

“To begin with, I have no intention to openly market the potion you make. Or rather, without the ingredients I provide, you can’t manufacture the purple potion. Do you agree?”

“That’s right. It’s been difficult to get this far, even when we’re using the material provided by Gown-sama. There’s still a lot of unknown factors, like how potent it is and what other effects it has.”

“Therefore, a public offer would only cause problems. Although simply asking about the source should be fine… we can’t be sure that there aren’t any opponents who’ll come at this operation with violence, right? …And from what Lupusregina’s told me, your village has suffered a monster attack. There is the possibility that these monsters, seeking the protection of strong walls, attacked your village in search of safety. Do you know why they did this, and did you take any prisoners?”

There were none, Enri answered in her heart. When they heard the monstrous roar from behind — made by the troll Enri and Nfirea had encountered — the goblins simply didn’t have the time or the ability to take anyone captive, and just finishing the fight had taken enough from them that there were no enemy survivors.

And that guy with the magic sword was very strong…

“Is that so. Well, that’s a shame… I considered the reasons why your village might have been attacked, which was what I just told you. As the village’s defenses become stronger, it will in turn create more problems. When an object is more valuable, it will be desired by more people, right? Similarly, if news of the potion leaked out…”

“…We should keep it a secret.”

“I’m glad you understand, Nfirea-kun. If we could make the red potion using just the ingredients from around the village, there would be no reason to keep it a secret… that is to say, everything we discuss after dinner will need to be kept strictly confidential. It concerns a duty to keep a secret. Then, preparations for the meal should be finished soon. Shall we?”

“Ah, no, there’s no need for food, how could we possibly partake of such amazing…”

Enri hurriedly shook her head.

“…Well, although I won’t force you… but isn’t it rare to have dragon steak as a main course?”

“Dragon?”

Dragons. In all the stories Enri had heard, they were mankind’s enemy, but some of them were friends of justice. However, no matter what stories they appeared in, they were always powerful beings. Could such beings become food?

Impossible. He must just have been teasing them.

At least, if Ainz hadn’t been the one saying it, she would have thought so.

However, since it was the great magic caster in front of her telling her this, that meant there was a high chance it was true.

“We also have desserts. Have you ever had ice cream? Although E-Rantel had some… don’t think I’ve tried them before. They’re ice-cold, and sweet… and they melt in your mouth. Something like sweet ice or snow.”

Enri and Nemu couldn’t help swallowing a mouthful of saliva.

“That’s a high-class luxury. Just one of those would cost more than a day’s worth of food.”

“It seems Nfirea-kun has tried something like that before. Then I shall produce more delicious ice cream for you than you can possibly imagine. Following that — where’s the menu?”

In response, the maid recited a long string of words.

“For today’s lunch menu, we will be serving two hors d’oeuvres. The first will be a dish of Piercing Lobster, which is a form of Noatun seafood, in a velouté sauce. The second will be a dish of Poiret’s foie gras of Víðópnir. The soup will be an Alfheim-style cream of sweet potato and chestnut soup. We have selected meat for the main course, which would be the marbled steak made from Jotunheim’s ancient frost dragons that Ainz-sama mentioned earlier. After that comes dessert, which would be Golden Apple compote, served in white wine and topped with yogurt. In addition, we have black tea-flavoured ice cream coated in gold leaf. For the after-meal beverages, we have considered that coffee may not suit everyone's taste, so we also have fresh peach juice. That is all. If any part of the menu requires amendment, please inform us and we will do so immediately.”

Is this a spell incantation?!

Enri, who had no clue about what had just been recited, was sure of that.

“Doesn’t everyone like foie gras? I think children will. Please add it to the menu for me. How about something light?”

“Yes. Then, we shall add scallop salad and star plum confit as hors d’oeuvres.”

“Hmm, there is that… is this menu better than the previous one?”

“Eh?! You’re asking me?!”

Enri, who had been suddenly put on the spot, answered frantically. It would be very confusing if she had to keep talking about this stuff she knew nothing about.

“Ah, that. No. Uh. I’ll leave it to you.”

It had taken all her effort to get a single sentence out. Ainz instructed the maid to prepare the meal as suggested.

Nemu looked at Ainz with worshipful eyes, muttering “so amazing” to herself. Enri felt the same way. This was too far removed from the world she usually lived in.

Wealthy people could spend money on luxuries. And being able to eat, not just to fill one’s stomach, but for nothing more than pleasure, was part of that.

Wealth, knowledge and power. A magic caster who had all of these.

He was a being that Enri as a simple farmer had no hope of reaching, a person better referred to as a king who stood above the tops of the clouds. This masked magic caster was such a formidable individual.

“Then, let’s go. Although, I don’t intend to join you. The three of you — that’s right, this family of yours should enjoy the meal with no reservations. After that, we will discuss business. Ah, I need to tell Lupusregina that I’m adding one more person to the list.”

“Eh? What’s that, Gown-sama?”

“No, it’s nothing, Nemu.”

Ainz stood up, and the sparkly-eyed Nemu stood up too.

Enri’s face had turned slightly hot from being referred to as a family, but she noticed something odd about Nfirea, who was rising slowly.

His mouth was flattened into a straight line, with no intention of opening it. However, Enri knew the secret to loosening him up.

That was to stare at him. Through the gap in his hair, Nfirea’s eyes flickered back and forth, until at last, as though giving up, he sighed.

“I was thinking that I can’t beat him. No, I know I can’t beat him. He’s far better than me as a man.”

“But you do know that I like Enfi just the way he is, right?”

Was the difference in their levels as men such an important thing? As a woman, she could not understand how significant it was.

Nfirea’s face turned bright red, then he took Enri’s hand.

“Let’s go.”

There was no longer any darkness in those words.

Although she didn’t know why her lover’s feelings had changed, cheering up should mean that he was happy. Hand in hand, Enri and Nfirea chased after Ainz and Nemu.

Side 2 (½) - A Day In Nazarick

第2話 ナザリックの一日

Prologue

Part 1

Nazarick Time: 5:14

A little droplet started to form at the edge of a golden water tap. It expanded, and gravity eventually pulled the water droplet towards the floor of the bathroom floor.

In the Great Tomb of Nazarick, there were many places to bathe. This was one of them.

There was only one silhouette in this large marble bathtub which could fit many people at once.

A blue water droplet fell along the contour of the smooth white body. The colour “blue” was not a relative term, but a literal observation as if it had been artificially dyed.

When it reached the feet, the blue liquid that had flowed down the contour of the body defied gravity and started climbing with a movement different from typical water.

“—Fuaah.”

The figure unconsciously made a sound which echoed throughout the bathroom.

As if feeling embarrassed from its own voice, a slender arm sprouted out from the blue liquid. There was no sound of water drops hitting the floor or ripples on the surface of the liquid. That was because it had abnormally high viscosity.

With this outstretched arm, the figure rubbed its face. It was a face which was idolized by many for its handsome appearance.

“Ha—”

The figure let out a big sigh and leaned backwards, but its body did not sink into the water. The blue liquid slowly lowered and supported the thin figure. Its movement and elasticity was like being embraced by an extremely soft waterbed.

The liquid definitely had a will of its own.

The blue liquid squirmed before sprouting several tentacles, each about the width of a couple of fingers. They moved as if hugging the silhouette of the figure.

Face, chest, stomach, arms and legs… and waist.

The creature jiggled as if being content at having restrained its prey. Its identity was “Sapphire Slime”, an advanced evolution of a slime.

The tentacle dug deep into that sensitive part around the waist.

“——Aa.”

Another moan flowed out. It was louder than before, but there was no effort to suppress the sound this time either. It was as if the figure had focused his senses on the slime that was squirming around inside its body.

The figure in the bath spoke to itself.

“…Ahh. I can’t hold it in anymore. I can’t describe this feeling with words.”

Murmured Ainz, who was in the middle of a slime bath.

He scooped up the slime and poured it on top of his head. The slime that had been enthusiastically cleaning the holes around his pelvis seemed to understand what its master wanted to have cleaned next. Ainz felt squirming sensations around the top of his head.

“Huu. This is heaven. Heaven indeed.”

Ainz’s undead body was comprised entirely of bones.

Because he did not excrete, his body neither got dirty nor did it smell bad. However, that did not mean he did not need to clean himself.

Dust and dirt would accumulate on his body, and on certain occasions he had been covered in his enemies’ blood. It was purely to clean himself.

Plus, as a Japanese person, he could not bear to not take baths.

“I’ve only been to saunas in the original world. I just wanted to submerge myself as soon as I found out I could take a bath… Maybe bathing is an integral part of being Japanese?”

Ainz sunk deeper into the slime while imitating the motion of sighing. A slippery sensation slowly wrapped around his body.

Since it posed no danger to him, he thought of it as a very sticky liquid instead.

If I wanted to bathe normally, it would have been a pain.

Ainz looked down at the most inconvenient part of his body to clean: his ribs. To wash them one by one took an inordinate amount of effort. He remembered how much time he had to put into it the last time and even though he was not capable of breathing, let out a sigh.

That was not the only annoying place to clean. His spine was a problem as well. Due to the protrusions on the bones, the towels would constantly get snagged there. Meticulous effort was needed.

At first, Ainz cleaned every single nook and cranny, but even with his strong mental fortitude, he was sick of it. He wondered what kind of cruel joke it was to take over thirty minutes just to clean his body.

Then he tried whirling around in soapy water like how washing machines span around. It wasn’t bad, but the problem was that he did not feel clean at all. If he didn’t scrub his body with something, it never felt like all the dirt was washed off him.

Next he tried a cleaning brush with a handle attached to it. It was truly a fine idea.

It did spray soap bubbles all around him, but Ainz didn’t have to clean the bath. That was the job of the maids, and they were happy to have something to clean. It was like killing two birds with a single stone.

But even this idea had a downside to it. He could not confirm whether his body was really clean. Just like how some people get cavities even though they brush really well, he was always worried about whether he had truly cleaned his body thoroughly.

Thus, Ainz arrived at the last and final solution of dumping slimes all over his body.

“Of course… this was revolutionary and ingenious. It’s the perfect plan.”

Ainz murmured while watching the sapphire slimes crawling around his body.

He nodded with satisfaction at his own idea. Perhaps this was his best idea so far since coming over to this world.

“The more I think about it, the better it seems!”

Praising himself over and over again, Ainz looked at the slimes scouring all parts of his body.

Very lovely indeed…

Even though they were a dangerous monster that could melt flesh with acid and were strong enough to bend metal bars, they cleaned Ainz’s body extremely well. In some ways, he felt as if they were his pets.

Yeah… A slime bath is good, but sometimes I should take a regular bath as well.

Nazarick’s 9th floor had various facilities. One of them was the grand bathhouse. It was a facility modelled after a spa resort and served as a multi-purpose bathing facility with a variety of tubs and baths.

“Should I go…?”

But going there alone was no fun. Then—

“Yes! I should take the guardians with me. It’d be good if everybody had some free time.”

Ainz smiled brightly at his own brilliant idea.

Nazarick Time 7:14

There were two types of maids in Nazarick.

One group was the combat maids, who were represented by Yuri Alpha, and the other was the regular maids who had no combat abilities. The latter were homunculi, with a combined racial and job level of 1, and they were responsible for various jobs in the tenth and ninth floor of Nazarick. In particular, cleaning the various Supreme Beings’ rooms was a task of utmost importance to them.

Within that group of maids, there was one maid called Sixth who kept her composure while rushing forward. This skill was a common technique amongst the maids, nothing special. She hurried towards the staff canteen.

There was only one reason to go to the canteen this early in the morning. When she arrived, almost all her colleagues had already gathered for breakfast and started eating.

The canteen was predominantly white in color, with sparse decoration.

The echo of the girls’ cheerful chatter echoed off the walls like ripples in water. It wouldn’t have been much of a problem if there was only one person, but since there were many people speaking, their voices blended into incomprehensible noise. On top of that, the sound of clinking tableware added to the din.

The maids in the canteen could be separated into four main groups. The first three were grouped according to their creators. There were forty-one regular maids in total, but it was not because each Supreme Being created their own maid. Rather, the regular maids were created by Whitebrim, Herohero, and Coup De Grâce. Strictly speaking, the last group wasn’t a proper group by itself, but composed of those maids who had detached themselves from the first three groups in order to eat in silence, to eat while reading or to talk to maids from the other groups.

Sixth, who came in late, belonged to the last group. She greeted the maids made by the same Supreme Being as herself —they were her sisters, in a sense— and then headed to her usual place.

“Good morning… have you eaten?”

“Good morning. And yes, we’ve already eaten. Breakfast was so good~ so smooth and creamy, so tasty~”

Foire delivered this deadpan reply. She was bad at lying, but lied anyway. She had short hair and her maid skirt was similarly shortened to match her energetic appearance.

Beside her was Lumiere, whose delicate face was crowned by her blonde hair which sparkled like stars.

“Good morning. Now then Foire, since you shouldn't need seconds, you can wait here for us. I haven't had breakfast yet, so I'm going to get some. Come, Sixth, let's go.”

Lumiere stood, trailed closely by Foire, who was frantically saying, “I was just kidding, really~”

After that brief drama, the three of them went over to the self-service buffet counter. Before they left, they had the maid called Increment, who was quietly reading a book, watch over their seat for them.

The first thing Sixth took at the buffet bar was a serving of crispy fried bacon. As a member of the faction which believed that “soft bacon is the devil”, she always went for that first. Next, she helped herself to some soup. Of the three flavours today —soup of the day, corn and onion— she selected the last. After that were sausages, french fries and danishes. Her other plate was piled high with onion salad, almost to the point of spilling.

Finally, Sixth placed an order with a masked manservant.

“Um, I'll have triple cheese, double onions, and extra mushrooms.”

The manservant nodded, and began making the omelette.

Sixth returned to her seat to put down her dishes, and then poured herself a glass of milk before returning to where the manservant was waiting with her freshly-prepared omelette.

“Thank you very much.”

The flawlessly-prepared omelette didn't have so much as a single singe mark on it, and she got back to her place just as her friends did.

“Then, let's eat!”

“Let's eat~”

“Let's eat.”

The three of them had their breakfast in silence. Slowly but steadily, they transferred the mountains of food — far in excess of what a normal girl would consume — from their plates into their bellies. It was because they all possessed ‘Increased Food Consumption’ as a racial penalty.

Because of that, even though they were among friends, they never shared while eating. Foire chewed while her cheeks were bulging with food, Lumiere ate elegantly, but her fork moved at a ferocious speed, and Sixth ate at a rate in between the two.

“Huuu…”

The three of them exhaled in unison and then looked at each other.

“Seconds?”

“Sounds good, but let's take a break first.”

“Yeah, I'm so stuffed~ Say, Sixth, isn't it your turn to serve Ainz-sama today? You seem perkier than normal today.”

Foire smiled mischievously, and so did Sixth.

“Lucky you, how much longer will it be until it's my turn?”

Lumiere counted off the days on her fingers.

The rooms of the Supreme Beings of Nazarick were massive in scale, so much so that one person needed half a day or more to clean one of them carefully. By numbers alone, it was possible for the maids to clean them all on a daily basis, even with Albedo's spare room factored in, but that would require a lot of people to work all day without any rest.

However, this was not a problem to the maids. They had been created by the Supreme Beings of Nazarick; it was only fitting that they should work their fingers to the bone for them in devout reverence.

And then, these fanatical workers had been told to stop by their god, Ainz Ooal Gown.

Ainz knew the hardships of working under unethical companies, and he could not bear to let these girls, who were like his friends’ daughters, suffer like that.

He had told them, “Don't clean the unused rooms so frequently”, and then “You will be grouped into teams for shifts.”

Thus, the regular maids of Nazarick were organized into two shifts; the day shift and the night shift. The former had thirty people and the latter had ten, while the one remaining person got the day off. After calculating the working days for the maids, the announcement that they would have a break every forty-one days was met with complaint.

It was not that there were too few days off, but the opposite. They protested the need to have a day off at all.

The purpose of their very existence was to work for the Supreme Beings. When they were told they didn't have to work, it damaged their self-worth and they felt like they no longer had a reason to exist.

As such, the maids took their concerns directly to Ainz. They said, “Please don't take our jobs”, “We want to do it all day and night”, and so on.

Ainz shot the suggestion down on the spot. A fatigue system existed in Yggdrasil and while it could be easily solved with magic, there was no guarantee that fatigue would be healed as easily in this world. Even with magic, it would be bad if the workforce was worn down to the point when it could no longer function, like a cog gradually losing its teeth due to overuse.

Yet, the maids adamantly refused to back down. Faced with their tears, Ainz gave in and proposed a new type of work for them, which was to personally serve him. That task entailed staying by Ainz's side to attend to his every need and whim, and the maids would take turns filling that role.

This offer was as tempting as sugar honey sprinkled with sugar to the maids, whose greatest joy in life was to serve the Supreme Beings. They accepted the order without a second thought, telling themselves that “we need to take care of ourselves and rest well the day before, so we can serve with all our strength when it's our turn.”

“We need our nutrients so we can work hard, you know. Plus, depending on the circumstances, you might need to skip a meal too.”

“Of course, when you serve Ainz-sama, your brain needs all the nutrients it can get.”

“I want something sweet~”

The three girls nodded in unison. It should be noted that all the maids carried several meals' worth of candy and other such treats on them. They would snack on them whenever they had free time while serving Ainz. However, be it fortunate or not, they simply could not find that free time. As such, the morning meal was very important to them.

“Have you heard? They say they're going to cook using ingredients from the outside world and have a food tasting.”

The other two gasped at Sixth's statement. She felt that was natural, because few of the maids thought well of the outside world — the world that lay beyond Nazarick. Some of them felt that the outside world was inferior to Nazarick, but most of them were afraid of it, because the floor right above their home, the 8th floor, had once been invaded by people from the outside.

“Can we all go to the tasting? Or will only a few of us be allowed to go?”

Just as Sixth was about to answer Foire's question, the atmosphere in the canteen changed. The air itself seemed to heat up. As the newcomer came into the maids’ sight, they couldn't help squealing in delight.

“Shizu-chan!”

“It's Shizu-chan!”

The person who had just entered the canteen was one of the Pleiades, CZ Delta.

The battle maids were like idols to the regular maids, and CZ was the most popular of them all. There were frequent struggles to sit next to her.

“Ah, the penguin’s here too.”

CZ held a penguin under her arm, and a worried-looking manservant was trailing behind her. It was the Assistant Butler, Eclair. He flapped his wings with all his strength, but there was no way he could escape with the strength of a level 1 Birdman. His futile struggles quickly lost their vigor while the maids looked on.

In the end, the penguin ran out of strength and went limp, like a wet dishrag.

“Shizu-chan! Over here! Eat with us!”

“No, come over here! Shizu-chaaaan~”

“Just throw that butler away! Over there would be fine!”

“Send that useless bird to the head chef, at least he'll contribute to Nazarick that way!”

There was a marked difference in the reception that the Assistant Butler and CZ received from the maids, but that couldn't be helped. He was disliked because he loudly proclaimed that he wanted to take over Nazarick, despite being a mere assistant butler. Even if he had been created that way by the Supreme Beings, his frequent announcements of those wild words made him difficult to have around.

CZ peered through the commotion around her, as though she was searching for someone. The adorable way in which she did so, like she were a child who didn't know where to sit, made many of the maids' hearts beat faster.

“How surprising, even that penguin looks cuter when Shizu-chan hugs him!”

“I want a Shizu-chan hug pillow, Albedo-sama seems to know how to make those, I wonder if she'll teach me?”

“Albedo-sama is very kind, I'm sure she'll agree. Why don't you try asking her next time?”

The sound of a book closing with an audible thud came from the next table over, and when Sixth turned to look, her eyes met Increment's.

“This place is getting noisy, so I'm going back. Since you're attending to Ainz-sama today, you should probably finish breakfast quickly and head over to him. Any mistakes you make will reflect on all of us.”

Having said what she wanted to say, Increment turned and left without waiting for a reply. As she watched her fellow maid leave, Sixth took out her pocket watch. Fortunately, she still had some time. After freshening up, she should be just in time.

“All right, I'll go grab some more stuff to eat while everyone's focused on Shizu-chan!”

Foire and Lumiere nodded at Sixth's idea.

“Oh~ that's a great idea~”

The sudden answer from the side made the three maids gasp.

“Lu-Lupusregina-san!”

With hands clasped over her lurching heart, Sixth turned to face the source of the voice. There hadn't been anyone there, but in the moment when everyone had been distracted by CZ and looked away, Lupusregina had appeared out of nowhere. She sat on a chair with her legs crossed and even had her food placed on the table.

“Aw, don't scare us like that, come on~”

Foire was still clinging tightly to Lumiere, her eyebrows pressed into a / \ shape.

“My heart almost jumped out of my mouth~”

Lumiere murmured like she was shocked out of her mind and paid barely any attention to Foire clinging to her.

Lupusregina —the friendliest of the battle maids— was unpredictable. Still, given that she spent her time moving between the different maid groups, being approached by her was a sign of good fortune. The proof was evident from the envious looks of some of the other maids, who had noticed Sixth and her situation.

“Ah, sorry, seems the experiment in the village was effective, you three made some pretty nice reactions~”

The way Lupusregina supported her face with her arm on the table, while having an evil grin on her face, made her look a little like a cat out of the storybooks. Although her smile was nothing but mischievous, it was still surprisingly attractive. The battle maid’s smile made Sixth’s head go blank for a moment. The other two seemed to feel the same way, but the first to recover was Fiore.

“The village?”

Foire tilted her head, which made her short hair scrape against Lumiere’s face. Resisting the urge to sneeze, Lumiere pushed Foire away before facing toward Lupusregina.

“Lupusregina-san, you work outside, right?”

“Yup, in the human village.”

“The human village, huh… it must be tough.”

Lumiere looked at Lupusregina with sympathetic eyes.

“Nah, it’s nothing like that! Since Ainz-sama ordered it, it’s worth doing! …Although, I have to say, it’s kind of boring. How should I put this… it would be so much more fun to squish them beneath my feet.”

Sixth has no particular reaction to that statement. Humans and their villages and whatnot were unimportant to her. Whether they prospered or were destroyed, the only thing that mattered was if they were useful to Nazarick.

“Even if Ainz-sama says that village has value, I still can’t see it~”

“Did Ainz-sama say that out of compassion for those worthless people in the village?”

“No, no, isn’t Ainz-sama like a hurricane of death? I’m sure he’ll grind them into dust when he feels like it.”

“What are you saying? Don’t you know Ainz-sama is the living avatar of wisdom? Even that wouldn’t be enough to describe him. All this must be part of his plan.”

“Ara, I can’t pretend I didn’t hear that, surely Ainz-sama’s power must be the best part of him…”

The four beauties stared at each other.

“Ainz-sama is a beautiful, compassionate person.”

“Ainz-sama is the incarnation of death.”

“Ainz-sama is an extraordinary hero.”

“Oh, looks like everyone has a different impression of Ainz-sama. Then, let’s have a competition to see who picks out the most suitable title for Ainz-sama.”

In an instant, everyone went silent. Lupusregina was wearing her usual smile, but she was determined not to let the other maids pull ahead of her in terms of appreciating her liege’s qualities. However, Sixth and her two friends felt the same way. Although the regular maids were weak beings, their love and passion for their master was no less than that of anyone else’s.

“Then, the three of you may begin.”

The first to speak was Lumiere.

“Then, as I said earlier, I wish to praise Ainz-sama’s beauty. So how about ‘A figure of beautiful porcelain, shining and flawless, the gentle lord of mercy.’”

Next was Foire.

“Well, if we’re going to praise Ainz-sama, then we should praise his awesome power right? What is more fitting than ‘Memento Mori’!”

The third was Sixth.

“Ainz-sama was the one who commanded the Supreme Beings, so his management skills would be excellent. So he is a ‘wise king’.”

Although everyone’s names fitted their master well, in the end they all thought that their own choices was the best.

Lupusregina coughed gently as Sixth, Foire and Lumiere looked at her. With a proud look on her face, she said,

“In the end, he is the absolutely strongest and most—”

“…There you are.”

The source of the calm voice was CZ. The penguin butler she had been holding under her arm had vanished to parts unknown.

“…Don’t use invisibility. So much.”

“Soz~ it’s a habit~”

“…And then. You had breakfast.”

A furious anger burned under CZ’s emotionless face. Sixth had a feeling that she shouldn’t be here any longer.

“…Ah, I-I have to go to Ainz-sama!”

“Then, I’ll go too.”

“I’ll send you along~”

Sixth and the others quietly vacated their seats, though they did feel a little bad ignoring Lupusregina’s pleading looks toward them. They only managed to go for one round of the buffet. Pangs of regret stung their hearts as they slipped away, but now was the time for work. Sixth paid no heed to the tension that was rapidly filling the air behind them. Instead, she lightly slapped her cheeks to focus herself.

Her face had the stern, brave expression of a soldier heading off to a war, but her footsteps were light and fast.

◆◆◆

Nazarick Time 9:20

6th Floor of the Great Tomb of Nazarick.

The undead that roamed all over the tomb were nowhere to be seen here. Instead, Aura’s beasts and other monsters that did not automatically respawn defended the floor. This floor was the widest in the Great Tomb of Nazarick and most of the floor was densely forested. It was an area befitting the word ‘sea of trees’.

However, the former members of Ainz Ooal Gown hadn’t been satisfied, and didn’t stop after simply covering the floor with greenery.

A Colosseum, giant trees, overgrown ruins, a lake, poisonous pits, twisted trees, mangrove forest, bottomless swamps, and various types of woodland were added to the floor. They had even accepted new residents recently, so there was a small village as well.

Amidst all the sights in this verdant expanse, there was a huge lake at the middle of the floor —though it was still smaller than the underground lake on the 4th floor— and it was surrounded by a plain rather than a forest. Compared to the entire 6th floor, the plain was as small as a cat’s brow, but for them, it was large enough.

The first one in the group was the guardian of the floor, Aura. The way she rode on top of her wolf with pitch black fur was gallant and could be described as nothing less than extremely skilful.

That was to be expected. To patrol a floor this large —though she possessed extraordinary physical abilities and just running around the entire floor was possible— she preferred riding on the back of the beasts that she had tamed.

There were two others with her.

One was the overseer of the guardians, Albedo. She didn’t wear her normal beautiful white dress, but was instead garbed in her black full plate armour used for combat. However, she did not carry any weapon or shield.

The other was Shalltear. There was nothing different about her from her normal attire. There was a slight glint in her eyes as if she was enjoying the situation.

“Then, I’ll start. Come, my steed.”

The skill Albedo activated was ‘Summon Mount’.

A monster with a coat coloured like silver armour appeared from nowhere.

With its silver mane and tail, it was a magical beast that resembled a horse. It wore a set of full plate barding, as well as a saddle and bridle. It was smaller than an average horse, but had an energetic aura about it. The final difference was the head, where two horns sprouted, pointing forward.

The first one to react was the one who was the most knowledgeable about magical beasts; Aura.

“Oh~ It’s different from a normal bicorn! The horns are amazing and its body is lean and muscled!”

Albedo smiled in satisfaction.

“Of course. This one is specially tailored to match my abilities. It’s something worthy of the name ‘War-Bicorn Lord’…. But it’s actually just a level 100 Bicorn.”

“Can it fly?”

“No, that’s too much. Its basic status is no different from a regular bicorn. It doesn’t have special abilities, only enhanced HP, strength and agility.”

“Ah, I guess if you don’t have ‘Rider’ class skills, it’s hard to evolve a mount. If it fights alongside us in battles between level hundreds, it could become a hindrance because of its lack of special abilities.”

“Yea, but I can protect this child with my skill, so it’ll be able to fight alongside me for long enough.”

“But do you not think it would be a waste to divert your resources like that? You will have plenty of openings in a battle like that. How about strengthening it by changing the equipment? I heard that mount-class monsters could be equipped with armour and horseshoes.”

“That’s right. You can change its equipment even if the mount was summoned with a skill. It’s somewhat related with Aura’s question earlier. For example, if you equip it with horseshoes imbued with the power of flight, it could go around flying, but since I already equipped it with speed enhancing equipment… That might be difficult.”

Albedo lightly petted her mount that was standing beside her. But the bicorn staggered a little as if Albedo had put some strength behind her tap. There was no way that the mount she summoned would be unable to bear such a light tap. When Albedo started frowning, wondering if the beast was being rebellious, Aura asked another question.

“Hehe~ So what’s the name?”

“It’s a bicorn, like you said earlier.”

“No, not that. I don’t mean the species name, but its name.”

“Does it need one?”

The vampire shrugged at Albedo, who looked like she wanted a second opinion.

“Probably? It is your pet after all.”

“It’s not really a pet… Does the same one come out every time I summon?”

On hearing Albedo’s question, Shalltear raised her voice after having a good idea.

“How about asking Kyouhukou? He is very skilled in summoning others of his species, so he would be very knowledgeable on the subject.”

“…I refuse. I feel bad because as a comrade in Nazarick, I shouldn’t dislike him, but I just can’t help it…”

“Ah… It can’t be helped. I’m sure he means well, but sometimes he tries to crawl up through your clothes. Though it seems like others like Entoma often visit him.”

“Do not speak of something so unpleasant. It makes my body itch just thinking about it… It truly is a room of terror. It is a floor under this one’s control, but I do not wish to ever go there.”

“…Shalltear, did you know? Entoma calls that room the ‘snack room’.”

“Eeeeeh? Really? Really?! Uwaaah~ I don’t want to go near Entoma ever again.”

Albedo agreed. She didn’t want to be near anyone who would go around calling those things snacks. Amidst the ominous atmosphere, Aura spoke in a loud voice to change the subject.

“Going back to the original topic, are you going to name it?”

“Well, if I do, what should I call it?”

Albedo murmured while sinking into deep thought. Since she would be riding it, she didn’t want to name it anything embarrassing. Amidst all the words and characters, an idea rang out like a song in her head.

“What could you possibly be mumbling about?”

“Ah, sorry.”

Albedo answered as if she had just woken up from a dream.

“If Ainz-sama permits me, I will give it a name that carries all my feelings with it: ‘Top of the World’.”

“Hmm. It is a good name. Is it supposed to refer to the one who stands at the peak of the world, Ainz-sama?”

Albedo simply smiled but did not answer.

Shalltear’s brow rose to a dangerous angle.

Aura interrupted the tense atmosphere that was going to erupt at any moment between those two people.

“Well, what about it! Since you summoned the bicorn, let’s move on to the next experiment!”

“Alright.”

While Shalltear was staring her down, Albedo turned around, stepped on a stirrup and mounted the beast with such a light movement for someone who was fully armoured. The moment she sat on the saddle, she could feel the bicorn’s body shuddering when they came in contact.

“What’s wrong?!”

Albedo let out a loud exclamation in surprise. Her bicorn, which was level 100, should not be staggering around so easily. Then she remembered when she petted it. Perhaps the problems started back then, but what was the cause?

“Aura! Shalltear! My bicorn’s acting weird. Can you check it out?”

The two realized that the bicorn was already staggering and could barely stand.

“Eeeh, come down first, Albedo.”

“A-alright.”

Albedo finally thought about it after listening to Aura.

The bicorn staggered and finally collapsed. It was breathing hard and the skin was full of sweat.

“…Perhaps you put on a bit of weight, Albedo?”

It was not intended to start a fight. To a bystander, it looked like the most likely reason.

“That’s rude! Considering all the muscle, I’m in the ideal weight range!”

“Maybe its muscles atrophied because you didn't ride it for such a long time?”

“What? How’s that… Since it’s a summoned mount, shouldn’t it be the same as summoned monsters? There’s no way that would happen.”

“How about I try to ride it?”

“Regrettably, no. This is my mount. Others can’t ride it. If you try to do it by force, it unsummons.”

“How about just asking the bicorn directly? Eh, bicorn, what’s the matter?”

Aura asked. It was not because Aura could communicate with horses, but because bicorns were relatively intelligent enough for her to try. However, bicorns could not speak and made only horse-like sound.

“If talking is too much… Can’t it write?”

The bicorn neighed like it agreed.

The three looked at each other.

“Aura, can’t you do something incredible with your power?”

“What do you mean by ‘something incredible’? We already talked with each other long time ago to fully figure out the extent of our abilities. Did our Overseer forget that, too?”

“Ara… Then how do you normally communicate with Fenrir?”

“Normally, I just tell him to do this and that.”

“But do you not talk with it? If you put in enough effort, can you not do the same with this child?”

“Just because I can communicate with the ones I’ve tamed, don’t assume I’d be able to do the same with everyone. Plus I’ve already tried it. You know Rororo, the hydra that the lizardmen are raising? I can’t seem to connect with him.”

The three looked at each other.

“…When in trouble, is Demiurge not the solution?”

“Unfortunately, Demiurge’s outside Nazarick on Ainz-sama’s orders. He’s rarely in Nazarick these days. I can still contact him, but I’d rather not unless it’s for official business.”

There were hints of jealousy in Shalltear and Aura’s eyes. Demiurge, who was busy helping out the master, was the target of envy and jealousy amongst the guardians.

“Ah~ I’m so jealous. I know defending Nazarick is an important role as well, but if we don’t get any intruders, we can’t get any results either. How would we know if we’re of any use or not? I want to work hard for Ainz-sama on the outside as well.”

“I have only made mistakes so far…”

“It’s alright, Shalltear. Soon, you’ll probably be able to do— no, you’ll definitely be able to do work that will help Ainz-sama. But it might be a bit difficult until you get smarter…”

“Aura, do you not think your words are a bit… harsh?”

“My, my, it’s true that you’ve only made mistakes so far. Try to get some results befitting the title of a Guardian.”

Shalltear grinded her teeth at Albedo’s words, but soon made a bright expression like a lit lamp.

“Hohoho, why do you think I brought up a topic that was not advantageous to me? For you, who would not know anything if Demiurge was not here, I will extend my hand to help you. I shall find out for you!”

Shalltear took out a book. It was heavy and looked like it was easily over a thousand pages long. For Shalltear, who appeared to be a frail girl on the outside, but completely different on the inside, the weight was nothing.

“Huuuuh? That’s... is that..?”

“Kuuuh, it’s the gift you got from Ainz-sama!”

Aura and Albedo couldn’t help stare enviously at her.

“That is correct. This is the encyclopedia written by Peroroncino-sama! A reward for carrying out Ainz-sama’s commands!”

It was more like a participation prize than a true reward, but Shalltear still smiled because it was one of the greatest gifts she could receive. Or rather, that was how it was supposed to be. An item left behind by one’s creator was more important than any reward.

The dictionary named ‘Encyclopedia’ was given to every player at the start of the game. It was a unique item that was impossible to take by force unless the owner gave it away voluntarily.

Yggdrasil was a game that emphasized the joy of learning about the unknown. This was an item that reflected the developer’s intention of turning mysteries into exploration.

Once a player encountered a new monster, the Encyclopedia automatically recorded its basic data. However, the detailed stats were not recorded, only the name, appearance, and if it was a mythological monster, the myth behind them. If one wanted to fully utilize the potential of this item, they needed to investigate the monster’s weaknesses or special abilities themselves and manually enter them into the book.

The Encyclopedia that Shalltear held was an item that Peroroncino used to own and which he wrote extensively on. Ainz had given it to Shalltear after remembering that Peroroncino left the book behind in the Treasure Room before he quit.

But a considerable amount of records had been erased from it. It was as if Peroroncino had been afraid of someone reading everything that was written on there.

The item did not have much use, but Shalltear did not care for any of that. For her, it was more important to have an item that her creator once used.

“B… bi… bico…”

Shalltear kept turning the pages while murmuring.

Albedo and Aura tried to peek from the side, but Shalltear stepped back with her book and glared sharply at both of them.

“Hmph. Well, it doesn’t matter. I got a bracelet from Ainz-sama anyways.”

Aura gently ran her finger along the silver band on her wrist and Albedo did the same to the ring on her left pinkie finger. But there were other people who had received the ring other than her.

I want to receive something special just for me. A special item from Ainz-sama…

Just as Albedo was gently rubbing her lower abdomen, Shalltear spoke out. It appeared that she had found the page she was looking for.

“Bicorn! Found it, now…”

Shalltear suddenly stopped moving and looked at Albedo with a surprised expression. Then she looked at the book again.

“What? What does it say?”

Albedo asked cautiously.

“…A sub-species of unicorn. Unlike unicorns which represent purity, bicorns represent impurity. Unicorns only allow virgins to mount them, but bicorns are the opposite and virgins cannot ride them… Haa?!”

Shalltear and Aura opened their eyes so wide, it seemed like they could almost fall out of their sockets.

“That’s impossible… Albedo is?”

“What do you mean impossible? Just what do you think I am?”

“Huh? Uh, but, how should I say this, Albedo, aren’t you a succubus?!”

“S… su… succubus… succubus.”

Confused, Shalltear started searching for the page on succubi.

“Well, I am a succubus! I’m sorry for not being experienced even though I’m a succubus! But I can’t help it! I’m stuck in the Throne Hall as the Overseer of the Guardians! And Ainz-sama never calls me over to his bed… I don’t want to do it with any men besides Ainz-sama…”

Albedo suddenly raised her head after she had been murmuring while staring at the floor.

“If we consider that…”

Albedo glanced at Aura before swaying her head. If Aura was experienced, it would have been a problem.

“Shalltear, what about you?”

“…I have no experience with the opposite gender. But if you are talking about experience with the same gender…”

Aura tilted her head as if she did not understand for a second before realizing what it meant and made an ‘Uwaaaah’ sound while frowning.

“But! There are no suitable men around. I prefer the dead ones, but rotting ones are too much… right?! Right?!”

“Even if you want our approval, it’s too much for us to accept your weird fetishes, Shalltear.”

All three lowered their gaze to the ground along with a silent agreement not to talk further on the subject.

“Well… I understand why I can’t ride the bicorn… but this is nonsense. What do I do…”

Albedo frowned in unhappiness. The bicorn shuddered as though it had been scolded as well.

“Mmm… It’s like a part of Albedo’s abilities are sealed now.”

“But it is not like mounted combat is your specialty anyway, and it is only one of your abilities that you cannot use. If you cannot ride bicorns, why not borrow other beasts from Aura? Is a unicorn not fine as well?”

“Muu… I don’t have a unicorn. Although I want to get one.”

“There’s a better way. I just need to get some help from Ainz-sama to ride the bicorn!”

Albedo smiled while exclaiming loudly as if there was no better alternative.

“That is cheating!”

“Hmph!”

Albedo snorted at Shalltear.

“Would you mind watching your words, Shalltear? This is a necessary issue so I can fully utilize my powers as the Overseer of the Guardians.”

“Kuu! Hmph! If you cannot bed him unless it is for duty… you are a failure as a woman. It seems you cannot seduce him with just your charms alone.”

“Aaah?”

Aura interrupted the two staring each other down as if she was at loss for words.

“Hey, I’m starting to wonder what the heck you guys are talking about, so can you guys quit it? Let’s stop talking about irrelevant things and focus the matters at hand. Since you won’t be needing it immediately, it’s not a big problem, right? Can’t you summon anything else?”

“Well, I have a magic item, so summoning a mount isn’t so much of a problem for me.”

“Well, then use that. Problem solved.”

“If I summon using a magic item, then I need to switch my equipment or take out the item, so there’s an extra step involved compared to just using a summoning skill. Plus, a bicorn has better combat abilities…”

“Then you can just let the bicorn fend off the enemy while you use the magic item to summon a mount. It’s a very common tactic for a Beast Tamer who’s just starting out.”

“I guess that’s the only way.”

“Then I suppose we can say that Albedo became weaker.”

“Can you not laugh so cruelly at others misfortune?”

“You seemed very happy when I had my misfortune, Albedo.”

If she had denied it, then Shalltear would press on saying that she was.

“Afu, seriously… Let’s stop staring at each other here and go somewhere else. This is a rare vacation that we got from Ainz-sama.”

Albedo conceded as did Shalltear, who stopped arguing to nod. But—

“…I don’t know what to do even if we do have a vacation. We were made to guard the Great Tomb and serve the Supreme Beings. To work is our very existence…”

“However, since Ainz-sama told us to take a break. We must take a break.”

The reason why three of them were gathered was because their master said:

“*All of you work so hard every day. Why don’t all the female guardians take some time off and spend it together every once in a while?*”

It was because of that.

“Well, since we went out together and spent some time together, should we disperse? But does this really count as spending some time together?”

“Good question. If he asks if we spent some time together, how much time is appropriate? Speaking of which, what do you guys usually do with your time?”

“I patrol between the 1st and the 3rd floors. I also gather the opinions of the area guardians, check the security status of the floors, and when I have free time, I take a bath and touch up my makeup…”

“You work harder than expected.”

“What might you mean by ‘expected’?”

“A bath… What about you, Aura?”

“Mmm… When Mare’s at the colosseum, I’m patrolling the forest. There’re a couple newcomers as well. Then when I come back, I sleep… That’s about it.”

“That’s it!”

Aura and Shalltear looked at Albedo in surprise.

“That’s it. By newcomers, you mean the inhabitants of the new village on this floor, right? I’ve never been there before. Let’s go together.”

“Ara, you’ve never been there? Shalltear, what about you?”

“I have been there.”

Aura explained to Albedo who was making a curious expression.

“All the other guardians are the same. Cocytus took a look when he came by for the lizardmen, Demiurge likes to drop by and check on things, and others come for a visit once in a while. Mmm… then let’s go now. It’s pretty close.”

♦ ♦ ♦

Nazarick Time 9:38

The newly created village on the 6th floor consisted of about ten log houses. It would be more accurate to call it a ‘tribe’. To the right of the village were farming fields and to the left was an orchard several times the size of the fields.

The surroundings were obviously a forest and from the sky, it would look like a gigantic hole, hence the name ‘The Green Hole’. When cutting down trees and digging out their roots, it would be inevitable for the ground to be uneven. However, the village was strangely immaculate, organized and clean. This was thanks to Mare’s magic.

In the orchards were various figures hard at work. At a glance, they appeared to be human women, but they had skin coloured like tree bark. Beside them were creatures that could only be described as moving trees.

The former were dryads and the latter were treants.

The treants carried the dryads on their arms and raised them up to the fruit trees so that dryads could take care of the orchard.

“Apart from them, ten lizardmen live here. They often go over to the lake to the north, where we’ve just been, and play in the water. It’s not like they live in the water either, isn’t it strange?”

“It is bigger than the last time I was here. More residents as well.”

“That’s right. When we conquered the Great Forest of Tob, we found a couple of species suitable to live in Nazarick as well.”

“The species that are acceptable to Nazarick… must be non-human, require no food and be mild-tempered, those were the conditions, right?”

“Yea, Ainz-sama said that. More specifically it wasn’t ‘require no food’ but ‘must be a self-sustainable species’… Since dryads and treants can gather nutrients from the soil, they don’t really need to eat. Although if the nutrient in the soil is depleted or if it doesn’t rain, it might be a little dangerous.”

“Hmm, does Mare make it rain every once in a while? Or do you use a magic item?”

“That’s usually Mare’s job. Same with recovering the nutrients in the soil. Apparently there’s a magic that makes the land more fertile and it also completely recovers the land. According to the dryads and the treants it’s so delicious that they’re going to get fat… but I wouldn’t really know about how it tastes.”

Albedo, who had been coldly looking around the village like inspecting the tools for an experiment while Shalltear and Aura were talking to each other, showed a glimpse of emotion in her eyes.

“Oh? Isn’t that the sous-chef in the field over there? What’s he doing?”

Following her line of sight, they saw a mushroom-like monster squirming in the corner of a small field, surrounded by a fence which was covered in vines bearing red fruits. On a closer look, it was apparent that he was picking those red fruits while wearing clothes that he could afford to get dirty.

“It’s just what it looks like. He comes here from time to time to grab ingredients. He’s also growing this and that on the side. Want to take a look?”

Albedo and Shalltear looked at each other. Looking at each other, they saw that neither of them was opposed to the idea and felt as long as they were not interrupting their duties, it would be fine to see what their comrade was doing.

“Yaho~. Working and sweating hard as always!”

The sous-chef raised his head at Aura’s energetic voice and spotted the three.

“It’s not like this body particularly sweats either.”

He stood up and straightened his waist with a grunt. It was an appropriate gesture for someone who was working while squatting, but he didn’t really have any feature that could be described as a waist. Because his body was completely straight and there were no contours or narrowing points anywhere, it was difficult to tell whether he really was stretching his waist or was doing it for the sake of doing it.

Next, the sous-chef stretched his neck as if it was strained. His head was a mushroom and looked as if a purple liquid was oozing from it, but since it was very adhesive and sticky it never splattered anywhere.

“Is that a tomato?”

Albedo took interest in the red fruit in the sous-chef’s hand. He raised it up all the way to his face and tilted his head as if it was something strange.

“It seems like a tomato. It’s a tomato you all know very well. Not the type that gathers sunlight to explode, not the type that attacks you suddenly, not the type that glows like gold when you cut it, but a regular tomato.”

“So I reckon it’s a common everyday tomato used as cooking ingredients, right?”

“Yes. Since I don’t have the skill for it, I can’t cultivate any vegetables that confer special effects. Were you interested in it because you wanted a dish made with tomatoes? Unfortunately, I can only make drinks.”

“No, I was asking purely out of curiosity. Isn’t it Shalltear who would want a dish made with tomato?”

“…Why do you think vampires would drink tomato juice? Undead cannot receive buffs from eating food at all.”

“Speaking of which, there are not many people in Nazarick who need to eat.”

Just as Aura said, most NPCs used items, so they no longer needed to consume food.

“It can’t be helped. If they started eating as well, the upkeep for Nazarick would skyrocket. Especially big eaters like your beasts would be a problem.”

“Seriously? Then should I let them go outside and forage there?”

“It’s not necessary. Ainz-sama, along with the other Supreme Beings, calculated our income and expenditures in such a way that they would be balanced when they created this tomb.”

“Ahhh, is that why Ainz-sama ordered so that only those who were self-sufficient be allowed in? So it would not upset the balance of the population?”

“Yea… Don’t you know about it?”

Albedo looked at the faces of the other three, one after the other.

“This is troubling. Not knowing anything about the place you’re protecting is no good. Make some time for it in your schedules. I’ll explain everything then.”

Albedo let out a sigh and looked at the field without much thought. Then she recognized the plant leaves that were spread out in front of her.

“Is that a carrot… no, a magical carrot?”

“No, that’s not the case. Did the Overseer not receive any reports about it?”

“What do you mean?”

The sous-chef’s gaze headed towards Aura.

“Mm, nothing… I see. You weren’t told of it. Then Aura-sama, what should I do? Will Aura-sama demonstrate it? I believe I taught you as well?”

“I definitely put it on the report…”

Aura smiled before breathing in deep and shouting with a loud voice.

“—Long live Ainz Ooal Gown!”

The rows of leaves started moving in response. The main roots, which were covered by the soil like normal carrots, dug themselves out by vigorously wiggling left and right.

They were shaped like ginsengs, but there was a clear difference between them and ginsengs. They had distinguishable arms and legs, and moved with clear self-awareness. Around the stem were holes resembling eyes and a mouth.

Shalltear opened her eyes wide and spoke their name.

“Are these mandrakes? I thought they didn’t exist inside Nazarick…”

“Ah! So that’s what it is! I knew about it from the report, but it’s my first time seeing it up close.”

The mandrakes arranged themselves into a formation while shouting ‘Long live Ainz Ooal Gown! Long live Ainz Ooal Gown!’ in unison.

“They’re not too smart. It’s a shame, considering that their cousins Galgenmaennlein, Alruna and Alraune are pretty intelligent… We didn’t spot any of them in that forest. Maybe it’s simply too big and that’s why we haven’t ran into any yet. There was a pretty sizeable underground cave at the mountain range. It seems like there’s a myconid tribe in there. We haven’t touched them yet.”

“But I’m truly moved that you taught them to speak this much.”

The sous-chef picked up one of the mandrakes lined up in formation and stared at it. The mandrake was squirming about, as if being held by the stem on top of its head hurt.

“Long live Ainz Ooal Gown! Long live Ainz Ooal Gown!”

The mandrakes broke their formation and surrounded the sous-chef as if they were protesting the violence inflicted against their comrade. However, they only repeated the same phrase.

“I apologize, Aura-sama. Could you make them return?”

“Okay! Good! Go back!”

Along with the mandrake that the sous-chef gently lowered to the ground, all the mandrakes went back inside their holes. The way they burrowed underground again reminded everyone of animals getting ready for hibernation.

“I see. So it’s basically like an animal's cry.”

“That’s correct. They can only parrot certain words and can’t speak in any meaningful way. They also seem to have a minimum intelligence threshold and can’t speak if they have not passed that threshold. The details are under research right now.”

The sous-chef also added — “I’m just repeating what Demiurge-sama said.”

“Hmm, Albedo, will it be fine for me to ask you a question? Isn’t it a problem that you, as the Overseer, do not know about the newcomers? What would you have done if there were spies?”

Someone objected before Albedo could answer.

“Ahahaha, Shalltear, that’s a good joke. Of course, because the 6th floor is so wide, it would be obvious for you to think it’d be hard to find an intruder. If they manage to escape the colosseum… and scatter in every direction like baby spiders, it might get annoying if there’s a lot of them.”

Aura’s laughs were empty and her gazes were icy.

“But aren’t you underestimating me? This is my hunting ground. Whether they scatter or not, I can immediately hunt them down. Even if they plan on harming Ainz-sama and somehow manage to escape this floor, they’d still need to get past Guren’s area on the 7th floor, and they won’t be able to survive even a single step on the 8th floor. If they do decide to run away, they’d need to tread through the dark waters of the 4th floor and your area… Do you really think that’s possible?”

Shalltear shook her head.

“It would be impossible.”

“So that’s why it doesn’t really matter if there’re a lot of newcomers on this floor. You don’t need to worry about it.”

“Aura already said everything I wanted to say. The plan is to gather all the new monsters here, or so it’s being discussed.”

“Huh? Not just the plant-type monsters?”

Aura asked in surprise and Albedo simply smiled.

“That was the initial plan, but thanks to you, Aura and Mare, we didn’t observe any problems so far. So we decided to take a step further. But it’s still in the initial planning stage and I have no idea if it can be implemented. So that’s why I didn’t tell you even though you’re the guardian of this floor.”

Albedo stated that she was not finished yet and explained rest of the plan.

“The name is Project Paradise. Starting with the base Aura built, it’s a gigantic project designed to gather monsters friendly to humans to live here.”

“Why is there a specific requirement saying it has to be creatures friendly to humans?”

Albedo started laughing as if she was waiting for the question. It was a very evil laughter.

“That’s the core of the plan. The core of Project Paradise.”

“To be honest, I find it hard to understand. Aren’t we working hard because Nazarick has to be a paradise for the Supreme Beings? Why did you name it like that?”

“It is an appeal to the outside world that we can peacefully co-exist with others.”

“Ah-ha… Is that the angle?”

“My goodness. Shalltear actually understood…”

Shalltear glared menacingly at Aure, showing an expression that could wither even the flames of a century-old love.

“Did you perchance think I was stupid?”

“…W-wait a moment Shalltear. Do you really have to ask, after everything you’ve done so far? Hmm? Just take a moment and try to remember..”

In a moment, as if she had actually remembered all her mistakes, Shalltear’s pupils dilated like a dead animal and she averted her eyes.

After seeing Shalltear’s pitiful appearance, Albedo decided to change the subject.

“Uhmm, Ainz-sama proposed this plan as well. When we were talking about the 6th floor, he mentioned his desire to collect various monsters as well. It’s not an idea you can come up with a narrow view of the world. I talked about Ainz-sama’s talents with Demiurge before, and we came to the conclusion that he’s a genius as expected.”

“Everybody knows that Ainz-sama is a genius, but I have heard that he doesn’t speak much.”

“Demiurge said that, right? Well… Ainz-sama doesn’t reveal his thoughts easily. And sometimes he acts strange, but the saying ‘The wise may seem stupid and the brave may seem timid’ hasn’t been wrong so far.”

Albedo’s eyes moistened as she shook her head.

“I still haven’t figured out why he created the persona of Momon the adventurer, but he’s truly scary… For everything to have been part of his plan from then until now…”

“You mean Ainz-sama disguised as the adventurer Momon? What about it?”

“You’ll learn soon enough… It’s because he has Momon. He will become the foundation of Ainz-sama’s rule. He’s truly great… Even Demiurge’s plans might actually be the result of Ainz-sama’s guidance—”

“What might you be murmuring about? It is a bit scary.”

Albedo pulled herself together at Shalltear’s words and coughed a bit before looking at the other three.

“What was I saying again? Yes, yes! Ainz-sama’s words and actions have deeper meanings behind them. Even though it might be impossible to fully comprehend his intentions, try to put some effort into understanding his plans.”

“It’s too difficult. Ainz-sama’s too smart. Ah, it’s a Spear Needle.”

Two gigantic white lumps with a height of more than two meters slowly waddled their way to Aura from the middle of the village. They were monsters that looked like angora rabbits.

“They are very cute.”

Shalltear was petting one of the white bunches of fur standing beside Aura.

“They’re so soft, I want one too…”

“Feels good, doesn’t it? But when fighting, their fur turns as sharp as needles.”

The level sixty-seven monster, Spear Needle.

When entering combat mode, their fur turned into a thicket of thin needles. If killed in combat mode, the fur wouldn’t return to its original soft state, so it was important to kill it stealthily with a single strike. That’s why the players who hunted Spear Needles were much higher in level than the monsters themselves.

“Is that true? Oh my, how scary.”

Even after saying it out loud, Shalltear kept petting it.

“Well, it won’t go into combat mode unless I order it to, or if enemies are nearby. But realistically, is there anyone who’s really going to be an intruder here? I haven’t gotten any reports from other floors either.”

“Of course. After all, I placed servants with excellent detection abilities on the 3rd floor. It would be hard for anyone to get through them undetected.”

Aura suddenly stopped moving and turned her head towards the colosseum.

“What is it, Aura-sama?”

“A gate from the 7th floor just activated.”

“From the lower floor? Demiurge’s out right now… Maybe it’s one of his subordinates? Are you sure it’s okay not to check?”

“Mmm— Mare’s there, so it should be fine. If there’s a problem, he’ll contact me.”

Aura touched the earring piece on her necklace.

“It’s not something special either. If someone wants to get to the surface from lower floors, they’d need to go through the gate on each floor at specific points. Speaking of which, we have someone who uses magic so they don’t have to run, right~?”

“Eh-hem! The Great Tomb of Nazarick truly is an impregnable fortress.”

“Yea, even if someone uses the super-tier magic ‘Sword of Damocles’ or the World-class item I possess, they wouldn’t be able to destroy an entire floor. That’s why you must never lose the ring which allows you to teleport anywhere at will.”

Everyone looked at the ring on Albedo’s left pinkie finger.

“That’s right. When Mare goes outside, he always puts it somewhere safe. Thinking about it this way, I can comprehend the importance of that ring— Ah! Mare contacted me.”

Aura put some distance between herself and the group before she grasped the earring and started talking to Mare. Aura slowly frowned and by the time the conversation was over, her expression was quite dark.

“Sorry. I don’t know why, but Mare said he’s preparing to go out. I need to go back just in case.”

“Is that so? Well… then should we return, as well, Shalltear?”

“I have no objection.”

“I’ll finish up with the field before leaving. I also want to talk a little bit with the dryads and the treants.”

“Then let’s disperse for now. Thanks for today. I think I finally learned how to spend holidays. If we get the time again… yea, let’s go for a bath together.”

Part 2

Mare looked away from the book he was reading to check for movement at the gate to the 7th floor.

He felt a little feedback of power and placed a bookmark before setting the book down beside the chair. He grabbed the staff beside him; the Divine-class item, ‘Shadow of Yggdrasil’.

Mare reached for the magic item hanging around his necklace with the other hand but stopped mid-action.

There was no need to contact his sister. Since there were no reports of an intruder, the person approaching had to be a comrade.

Mare shuffled his way down with small steps as he headed toward the gate.

His sister liked to jump down to the colosseum from the audience seats, but Mare didn’t. The stairs were there for a reason and using them seemed like a show of loyalty to the Supreme Beings. They probably intended for the stairs to be used.

I can’t say that to sister… She’d give me a scary glare…

So he decided that at least he would not let the generosity of the Supreme Beings go to waste and went down through the stairs.

Beyond the waiting room, there was a figure standing in front of the mirror that sparkled in seven different colours.

“D-did you wait long?”

“Oh oh! Isn’t it the floor guardian, Mare-sama! For you to come here personally, I am honoured.”

The clown, dressed in a pure white costume with a mask shaped like a bird’s beak, bowed to Mare, who did the same.

“Hello, Pulcinella-san. What are you here for?”

“Well, I don’t know if you’re aware or not, but I’m currently working under Demiurge-sama’s orders. Today, I came as Demiurge-sama’s messenger. Please, take this.”

The clown handed over the folder he was holding.

“If it’s from Demiurge-san, is this the memo folder?”

“That’s correct. My, my, for Mare-sama to come out personally. I was really lucky. If it had been Aura-sama I would have needed to ask her to call you.”

“Huh? Is that so?”

The memo folder was a system devised by the ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, Ainz Ooal Gown, himself. It was a system that allowed floor guardians to write down non-urgent messages and communicate with each other. Nothing similar existed until now.

When Mare accepted the folder, he got a strange feeling and muttered “T-this is…” while staring at it.

“H-huh? But why couldn’t you give it to my sister?”

Since Aura was a floor guardian as well, there was no reason why the message couldn’t be delivered to her as well. She was also a hard worker, so she wouldn’t just throw the folder in a corner somewhere.

“I don’t know the details myself. But Demiurge-sama gave me specific orders to not give it to Aura-sama and hand it directly to you.”

“I see… W-what about Demiurge-san?”

It was a short question, but Pulcinella understood what he meant.

“…I can’t say I fully understand what he meant either. However, I believe the answer or the reason would lie in that folder.”

“Ok… Uh, hmm, speaking of which, uh, what’s Demiurge-san doing right now?”

“He’s conducting a breeding experiment. Humans can breed with each other, but can’t breed with demi-humans. Is this not a true tragedy? For lovers to be unable to bear the fruit of their union just because they’re from different species! To save such unfortunate souls, Demiurge-sama is working hard. To develop that possibility between humans and demi-humans!”

The clown spoke as if he was reciting a speech with both arms wide spread and pointing at the sky. Mare blinked at Pulcinella, who changed so suddenly.

“Ah, please excuse me. I’ve gotten too excited over Demiurge-sama’s generosity of trying to bring joy to humans. Please, forgive me.”

“Ah, it’s, uh, fine.”

“Demiurge-sama said that he would make himself —or rather the demons— the target of the human’s hatred, so they wouldn’t resent each other. Such immense selflessness! This Pulcinella cannot even see because he moved me to tears.”

Pulcinella motioned to wipe his tears on top of his mask. Of course, there were no actual tears and he spoke in his regular cheerful tone, which didn’t sound sad at all.

“…Why would they hate him?”

“I cannot understand why they would hate our kind and generous Demiurge-sama, but he said that himself. Ah, speaking of which, listen to this. Because Demiurge-sama was so generous, he took pity on the starving livestock. So he made them exchange children with each other, roasted them and put them on the table. If he was heartless, wouldn’t he have served them up without exchanging them?”

“I-Is that so?”

“Of course. He even allowed them to say farewell by bringing over both parents and letting them sit by the table… For there to be someone like Demiurge-sama, who would be considerate enough for the family to say farewell while smiling… There won’t be anyone besides the Supreme Beings. I’m sure of it.”

“I guess…”

Mare gave a flat response to Pulcinella’s enraptured speech. He didn’t care what happened to anyone who did not belong to Nazarick. After a couple of seconds, Mare erased all thoughts of Demiurge’s livestock.

“Plus, when starving, their head might say yes, but their stomach might not. Demiurge-sama thought ahead and after warning them, made sure they ate it all, down to the last bit. He is a truly generous…”

Feeling that the story would not end, Mare quickly interrupted.

“…H-how’s Guren-san doing? If I want to send the message back, I might need to relay it to him, but I don’t know what he’s doing and where.”

“…’he’ or ‘she’, I personally theorize Guren is genderless. Last time I saw that person was when Demiurge-sama wasn’t present and it was lying in ambush around the 7th floor’s gate.”

“I-is that so.”

Mare remembered what Guren looked like.

An area guardian which hid its gigantic body in lava and pulled the unsuspecting opponents into terrain that was advantageous for itself — Guren.

It was only level 90, but because it was optimized for combat, in terms of pure fighting ability, it ranked amongst the strongest in Nazarick and could even fight evenly with some floor guardians. Thus, it was the most suitable one to defend the 7th floor in Demiurge’s absence.

“Ah, it seems I was too chatty. Since I already passed on the memo folder to you, I will now go off to spread smiles and laughter.”

“T-Thank you.”

Mared bowed his head and Pulcinella replied softly.

“No need to thank me. I am satisfied just watching your smile, Mare-sama.”

The clown dramatically shrugged his shoulders .

“Until we meet again.”

He disappeared through the gate to the 7th floor while waving.

After watching him disappear, Mare opened the memo. Filled with feelings of superiority and treachery from the fact that only he could read it and not his sister, Mare quickly scanned the page. He blinked a couple times after he finished reading it.

This… it’s more like a message Ainz-sama sent to the guardians than a memo.

The message was addressed to only the male guardians and praised them for their usual hard work. The following content could be summarized as invitation to take a bath together if they had time.

The names of the participants listed were Ainz, Demiurge, Mare and Cocytus. The first two people had circled ‘participating’ between the choice of participating or not participating. Normally, Sebas’ name would be there as well, but he was out gathering information in a human city with Solution.

Uh, what's the date going to be…

There was a side saying that the date was undetermined and will be arranged for the most convenient date for the participants. There was no reason to hesitate in circling the "participate" option. The message said it would be fine for them not to participate, but Mare just couldn't refuse a proposal from his kind and generous master. No, there would not be anyone in the Great Tomb of Nazarick who would refuse.

Mare picked up the pencil that was included in the file and circled the "participating" next to his name.

"…Ehehe."

He smiled while looking at the circle beside his name, but dark clouds soon shrouded his heart.

"Uh, but… how do I give this to Cocytus?"

There were several mentions across the message to not tell anything to the female guardians and Mare could feel his master's intention of wanting to keep it a secret amongst the male guardians. In this case it would be best for him to hand the message personally.

If I keep it a secret and sneak out… it won't be good, right? Because if I'm… uh, do they call it "attention"? While I'm getting that, she'd need to defend the floor alone.

Unless it was due to orders, Mare would always tell Aura where he was going, even if he was just going to visit the other guardians. It was the right thing to do since Aura and Mare were both tasked with defending this floor.

Mare grasped the magic item hanging around his neck.

“S-sis? Can you hear me?”

An immediate reply came.

『I can hear you Mare. What’s up?』

“Ah, that’s a relief. Uh, what was it. I need to go visit Cocytus right now. I’ll be back soon.”

『To Cocytus?』

“Yea. I need to hurry.”

『What’s it about?』

Mare’s shoulders flinched for a brief moment. He felt like his voice would crack, but then he barely managed to squeeze the words out.

“N-n-n-n-nothing? It’s nothing… but I need to go.”

『Hmmm…』

Aura’s voice sounded as if she was suspicious, and the thought of that caused Mare’s hands to be soaked with sweat.

But, uh, I can’t help it. It’s Ainz-sama’s orders.

Apart from Mare and Aura’s creator —Bukubukuchagama— Ainz’s words ranked higher than any other Supreme Being’s. It took priority over anything else.

『Well, I guess it doesn’t matter. Go then. Remember that the 5th floor is cold, so protect yourself against it… Ah, but if it’s Mare there won’t be a problem.』

“Y-yeah. It’s fine if I use magic. Then I’ll be off.”

If he kept talking for too long, he might give something away. So Mare quickly took his hand off the magic item. It sounded like his sister was trying to say something else before she was cut off, but whether it was fortunate for him or not, he couldn’t hear it.

“A-alright! Time to hurry.”

Mare activated the most important ring he received from his master.

Immediately after he teleported, Mare felt something white sticking to his face.

It was snow that was flying in the air.

Mare’s breath condensed into a white cloud which was instantly blown behind him. It was the result of the snowstorm and the extreme cold in the area.

The snow and ice flew along with the storm in a frenzied whiteout, and the endless snow covered any trace of footprints almost immediately. Though the weather was designed to make any invader lose track of where they were, it was usually not this severe. Usually, the black clouds in the sky would drop a few sprinkles of snow, and even though this was a gloomy world, the clouds never completely covered the sky.

“……Huh…”

Mare looked to the left and the right. He used the Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown, so he should be close to where he wanted to go.

Mare moved swiftly after finding his destination. There were no footprints left where he walked. There was no soft sinking sensation like stepping on snow, it felt more like walking on hard ground.

This pure white world without a trace of anybody else seemed to be telling Mare that there was only snow here. Of course, Mare knew with his passive magical ESP that this wasteland was just a disguise. The ambushers knew that he was the 6th floor guardian, that was why they didn’t show themselves.

Mare arrived at his destination in silence. In front of him was a gigantic white sphere that resembled an upside down wasp’s nest.

Surrounding the structure were six towering crystals, their sharp edges pointed to the sky. There were human-like silhouettes visible on the inside.

As Mare stepped forward, an unnerving cracking sound came from below his feet. When he turned his attention to the floor, he could see that he was standing on a sheet of smooth ice, unlike the snow-covered plain he had been walking on thus far. The ice looked thick, but he could tell there were dark shadows lurking just under the ice.

Mare kept on walking. He took each step with confidence, as if he knew the ice would not break. Despite the cracking and crunching noise, Mare arrived before the gigantic sphere without a problem.

“E-excuse me. Uh, is Cocytus-san here?”

Mare spoke towards one of the gigantic crystals instead of the sphere.

In response, monsters with the appearance of a female human phased through the crystal. The number of monsters corresponded to the number of crystals and they wore pure white clothes. Their skin was bluish-white and their hair were black. They were “Frost Virgins” , a level 82 ice-type monster, that served as sentries for Cocytus’ residence “Snowball Earth”, as well as his bodyguards.

“Welcome, Mare-sama. Well met.”

“Uh, what about, uh, Coctyus-san?”

“Cocytus-sama is currently outside the Great Tomb of Nazarick, visiting the new lizardmen village.”

“I-is that so.”

The frost virgin replied while bowing.

“Yes. If you have a message to leave for him, we’ll take it for him. What do you wish to do?”

Mare hesitated.

Since he came this far, he could just leave the folder in Cocytus’ room and leave a brief message with the frost virgins. But considering the content of the memo, giving it directly to Cocytus would be fully respecting the master’s commands.

So how would he go to Cocytus, who was outside.

There was no special rule forbidding the guardians from going outside Nazarick. However, there were conditions to meet before going outside. It was because the master had forbidden all independent activity outside the Great Tomb of Nazarick.

The information gathered so far indicated level 100 beings like the guardians of Nazarick were unimaginable walking disasters in the outside world. There would be no problem even if Mare, one such walking disaster, engaged in independent action. It would be the outside world that should be afraid of him, but that was a mistake only possible after forgetting one important incident.

There was an unknown enemy who brainwashed Shalltear and might possess a World class item. There were also glimpses of player activity in the shadows every once in a while.

They needed to take extra precautions because they could not assess how many or how strong the enemies were.

“Hm, mmm. What should I do…”

Anyone who wanted to go outside needed to be accompanied by at least five level 75 servants. Mare had two dragons as direct subordinates, but they were too big to be discreet. It would be best to ask his sister, but considering how the conversation went, he did not want to do something so scary.

Then an epiphany struck him. It was perfect in both level and number.

“S-sorry, but can you come with me?”

“I, I apologize, but we have been ordered by Cocytus-sama to guard this place. With the exception of Ainz-sama, we cannot disobey Cocytus-sama’s order… Please forgive us!”

“Ah, no, no, it’s fine.”

It could not be helped. If he had thought about it, then it would’ve been rather obvious that they couldn’t do so. The next idea that came to his mind was to ask the demon lords in the 7th floor, but unless he gave them a good reason, he would be rejected again. It was true that he couldn’t rely on any floor but the one Demiurge guarded. It was difficult to ask for help from any guardians outside the names that were written on the memo. Also, most servants over level 80 in the Great Tomb of Nazarick were direct subordinates of a guardian and those who were not, were few and far in between.

Because of that, Mare would need to ask Demiurge if he wanted to borrow the demon lords.

But how would I contact him?

The only way to contact Demiurge who was outside, was to dispatch a servant as a messenger or use magic.

But besides him…

Mare remembered the book he had just been reading.

Did he have any subordinates over level 75? But he's not a guardian… Muu, would it be fine since he's a man as well? If I ask him to keep it a secret…

"T-thank you! Uh, I'll be fine."

"Is that so? I understand."

Mare activated the ring. His destination was the Grand Library in Nazarick's 10th floor, Ashurbanipal.

◆ ◆◆

Nazarick Time 9:54

The scenery changed immediately from a snowy plain to a large room. The room was decorated simply, with plain black as a base colour, while dim, reddish light illuminated the area. The ceiling formed a gently sloping dome, with a grand set of double doors on the opposite side.

Golems were standing on either side of the doors that led to the Throne Hall. They were almost three meters tall, nearly as large as the doors themselves. The golems were shaped like armoured warriors and because they were made from rare metals, they were stronger than regular golems made by the Supreme Beings.

“Excuse me, can you open the door?”

In response to Mare’s request, the two golems put their hands on the door and slowly pushed it open. After a heavy, creaking sound, Mare walked in through the open doors that were big enough for several people to enter at once.

The sight that lay before him was more reminiscent of an art museum than a library. Countless decorations added flair to the level, while the bookshelves and even the books themselves looked like ornaments on display.

Not a single speck of dust could be seen on the immaculately polished hardwood floors and the surface was covered in beautiful engraved patterns. The upper area was quite roomy, with a hall-like design, and a balcony extended from the second floor. Even on the second floor there were countless bookshelves, arranged as if they were peeking into the room. The semi-circular ceiling was covered in grand frescos and luxurious carvings.

There were even books in the numerous glass bookshelves across the room. There were many source of light in the room, but none of them too glaring. As a matter of fact, a regular human would frown, claiming it was too dark.

It was impossible to take in the whole interior at one glance because the bookshelves covered the scenery at every angle.

Amidst a silence befitting a library, the doors slowly closed behind Mare. It turned darker since there was no light coming in from the entrance. The stillness in the air panned out to create a creepy atmosphere that made silence sound like another noise.

Of course, for someone like Mare who could see in the dark just as well as during the day, it was not creepy at all.

Mare headed towards the inside at rather fast pace.

This was the “Room of Logic”. For the most part, the library was divided into three large rooms; the “Room of Wisdom”, the “Room of Logic”, the “Room of Magic”. There were also several smaller rooms designed for specialized uses and the individual rooms for the staff. His destination was quite far away considering the size of the area.

To either side of the tunnel were rows of bookshelves with countless books arranged on them.

The books in Yggdrasil could be divided into five large categories.

The first category was a collection of recorded monster data, which was required to summon said monsters as mercenaries.

There were three types of monsters inside Nazarick. The first type consisted of monsters that were created in a similar manner as player characters. The next type consisted of automatically spawning monsters that were under level thirty, and the last type consisted of monsters that were summoned as mercenaries. Mercenary monsters needed to be summoned using a book, a special summoning ritual and adequate amount of gold. Thus, they could not be summoned without a book.

The second category was magic items.

Certain data crystals could only be imbued into a book-shaped object. Items shaped like books usually tended to be single use magic items. The difference between a scroll and a book was that while scrolls could only be used by certain classes, anybody could use a book.

The third category was event items.

It was not uncommon for an item to be required when advancing into a special class, and some of these items came in the shape of a book. Even Ainz needed a “Book of the Dead” when he evolved from a Skeleton Mage into an Elder Lich. There were other books such as “Bibliography of Weapon Research” or “Anecdotes of the Four Great Spirits”. There were also books that taught new magic.

The fourth category was cosmetic skin data.

These books contained the cosmetic skin data of objects like swords, shields and armour. Players with certain blacksmith skills could put new skins on items with this and other appropriate materials.

The fifth category was novels in the form of book shaped items.

Normally, there would be old and classic literature whose copyright ran out a long time ago, but there were also background stories distributed by the development team and original novels written by players in Yggdrasil. There was also fanfiction based on the worlds of YGGDRASIL or game guides in the form of diaries or novels.

The majority of the countless books in the library belonged to the first category, to summon monsters as mercenaries. Of course, there was no need to actually hoard so many copies of them.

Even if they used the guild’s entire gold supply, they still would be unable to use even 1/10th of the books. Because the monster data was not very expensive, the guild members started making a massive number of duplicates. The intention had been to hide valuable items amongst a mass of useless ones.

Mare gave the books a sideway glance as he walked past them.

Then a ghastly shadow suddenly appeared from beyond the bookcases, as if stopping him.

It wore a black hooded robe that seemed to blend into the library itself. On its belt was a jewelry embedded wand, with various straps interweaved with crystals. It had a pale face that looked as if it had been embalmed. Every time it moved, darkness swirled around it ever so subtly.

It was an infamous monster amongst undead magic casters types, an “Elder Lich”.

Their nickname in Yggdrasil was “white palter of false wealth”. Since it was only level 30, it had the second-lowest rank in the hierarchy of Elder Lich type monsters. There were also other subspecies that had different colours called “red palter of false wealth” and “black palter of false wealth”.

What differentiated it from other elder lich was the fact it wore an armband on its left arm. The words “Librarian J” were written on it.

“Welcome, Mare-sama.”

The elder lich bowed while speaking in a cracked voice that was barely audible. It bowed respectfully with one hand on its chest.

“I-I came to see the Chief Librarian. Is he, uh, in the inner chambers?”

The elder lich looked as if it was thinking for a second before replying.

“The Chief Librarian started crafting scrolls not too long ago, so he should be in the Crafting Room.”

“Thank you.”

“I shall guide you to him. Right this way.”

“It’s alright! I don’t want to interrupt you.”

“Please do not mind it. It is our role to help the visitors.”

It would be rude to reject him after all this.

“Alright, thank you then.”

The Elder Lich made a frightening smile and started walking. Mare looked at the other Elder Lich-type undead he passed by, while following the one that was guiding him.

“Then I shall return these books for you.”

“Ah, please. Thank you.”

The elder lich looked at the title of the book he received from Mare.

“Ah, ‘The Adventures of Tom Sawyer’. Did you find it interesting?”

“Yes, it was very fun! I was wondering what I should read next.”

“Then I have a recommendation for you. It’s a book that will make you laugh non-stop. It’s about murder— Ah, this way.”

“Thanks.”

Mare opened the door it pointed at.

The room was wide open, but the humongous bookcases at all sides of the room radiated an invisible pressure.

Inside the bookcases were countless catalysts such as minerals, precious metals, stones with special attributes, gems, various powders and the organs of animals, all arranged in a neat fashion. Besides those items, there were countless parchments both rolled and unrolled.

All these items were materials to make scrolls with.

Of course, these were not all of the Great Tomb of Nazarick’s resources. The Treasury contained several hundred times the amounts of the resources here. What was in this room was purely for what was needed here and now.

In the middle of the room was a big drawing board with a parchment on top of it. In front of it was a skeleton of something that looked like a hybrid between a human and an animal. It was not that big, perhaps

150 cm tall. It had two horns resembling those of a devil coming out from its skull, its hands each ended in four fingers, and its feet were hoofed.

This strange figure was robed in a saffron-coloured himation. Also there was one himation on its head, wrapped like a hood so the horn would not rip it, and there was one on its waist as well. There were other accessories, such as a silver bracelet embedded with seven differently coloured gems, a necklace with a golden ankh, various rings that looked like twisted fingers and gems on the himation that served as a waist belt. They were all magical items with considerable mana stored inside them.

Although its appearance and equipment were strange, it was actually one of the first undead species, a skeleton mage. It would be a step below the elder lich he had just met. But this skeleton mage was the Chief Librarian of this humongous library, Titus Annaeus Secundus.

It was an NPC created by a Supreme Being for crafting skills rather than combat skills. Its overall levels were also higher than the elder lich from before.

“Greetings, Guardian Mare. I welcome thee.”

“Hello, Titus-san. I have a favour to ask.”

“Of course, of course. I shall heed thy request.”

“Y-yea. Uh, you know, I was wondering if you could lend me some servants over level 75 from here.”

“I understand. Thou seek’st to go outside.”

“Huh? Y-yeah. You guessed it.”

“…Mine ears hath never forgotten a word from the Overlord, Ainz-sama. Also considering thy position, ‘tis an easily deducible conclusion — Good!”

He made a decision in a flash.

“I shall lend thee the Overlords of this Library: Cocceius, Ulpius, Aelius, Flavius and Aurelius.”

“Eh? Really?!”

“Of course. Verily, their presence here is an extravagance. They would rejoice having the chance to defend thine person as opposed to these ancient tomes.”

“T-then, uh, thank you very much!”

“But that doth not mean it shall be for free. I shalt ask one thing from thee; to aid in the creation of a scroll.”

“Ah, yes! What do I need to do?”

“Be at ease. When I speaketh so, activate thine 4th tier magic towards the scroll.”

“C-can it be any kind of magic?”

“The decision shalt be thine to make.”

Mare frowned. It was most difficult for him when he needed to make a decision. He wondered if a regular spell would be fine.

Titus reached for a small table besides the drawing table with a parchment laid on top. There was a mound of gold coins gleaming on top of the small table — they were gold coins from Yggdrasil.

Some of the Yggdrasil gold melted under the skeletal hands and flowed onto the parchment as if it had a will of its own.

The golden fluid flowed to a point on the parchment before spreading out. In the time it took to take a breath, there was an intricate golden magic circle on top of the parchment.

“Ready.”

Mare quickly cast the spell after waiting tensely and he could feel his magic being sucked into the magic circle.

A regular scroll would have been complete at that stage, or so Mare thought.

Until—

There was a scarlet flame.

Something that should not have happened occurred. As Mare watched on in panic, the parchment burned up like high alcohol content liquor and vanished within the blink of an eye.

There was no trace of what had happened, as if it had been an illusion all along. Not even the smell of burning remained. But there was one piece of evidence that spoke of what had taken place.

It was the ashes from the parchment.

Titus picked up the ashes as if he had expected it to happen.

“T’would seem, it cannot hold a 4th tier spell. The puissance of the wonderworker changeth nought about the outcome.”

Titus wrote down a memo saying “Heat — ten year's old skin cannot withstand” while grumbling.

“Uh, w-why was it like that? Did I?”

“Thou doth need not mind. Mine experiments with the bounty of this world hath been devised to limit the depletion of Nazarick’s reserves. But surely this harvest must be of a base quality.”

There were limits on what kind of materials could be used for scrolls, depending on the tier of magic they were intended to contain.

For example, regular parchment could be used to store 2nd tier magic, but nothing above that. A scroll made with materials of the highest tier, like dragonhide, could contain even 10th tier magic.

Of course, dragonhide was an extremely rare item that could not be obtained except from killing a dragon. All the members of Ainz Ooal Gown used to hunt dragons together back in the past, but that was back in the days of YGGDRASIL. Because of that, Ainz limited the usage of dragonhide until they could confirm the existence of dragons and other creatures in this world.

There was bound to be a moment they would need the materials, and it was foolish to use their supplies without being able to replenish them.

“No, not my dragons!”

“Perish the thought. No need for such measures exists. Thine dragons were specially summoned by the wills of the Supreme Beings. T’would be unthinkable to harm such blessed beings.”

Titus disposed the ash, which was all that remained of the scroll, into a waste bin. As he did so, he looked at the relieved Mare.

“Uh, does that mean the parchment from this world isn’t suitable for making scrolls?”

Mare looked at the ash.

“T’would be very likely. Or not— I recant my previous statement. ‘Tis difficult to tell. ‘Tis not unthinkable for mine methods of artifice to be a deviance in this world. For instance, the methodology of potion manufacture diverges vastly from those methods I know to be efficacious.”

“T-that’s a possibility? But are you sure it’s the parchment’s fault after just one failure?”

“Just one? I hath experimented repeatedly with various parchment materials from the surface. But with magic over 3rd tier, t’all ended the same; in flames. Tis most likely because the parchment could not contain the magic and combusted as the result.”

“But don’t the magic casters in this world use parchments like the one from just now?”

“In all likelihood, the magic casters of this world utilize regular parchment. I cannot conclude that practice is universal in all the countries of this world. But when utilizing the parchment found in the countries near Nazarick—”

Titus took out a roll of parchment that was a little different from the one he just used.

“—the experiment concludeth that 1st tier magic was the limit.”

“Does that mean humans have always been using crude and unrefined materials?”

“Probably not. The difference doth lie in the process of manufacture. Though it paineth me to admit it, their technique is quite refined. I can but master this new methodology and thereby improve myself.”

“You’re amazing!”

Mare felt respect towards the Chief Librarian who took great effort to polish and improve his abilities.

“’Tis be thanks to all the Supreme Beings. Now then, Guardian Mare, I shall lend thee the Overlords as promised.”

◆◆◆

Nazarick Time 10:28

Mare arrived in a stone building in middle of the lizardman village after depositing the ring back in Nazarick and using mass teleportation.

The lizardmen did not possess the capabilities to build with stone materials, which needed a strong and solid foundation in humid and marshy land. It was a given that outsiders had built it — the ones dispatched from Nazarick.

The reason why Nazarick had bothered to send someone over to build something like that stood behind Mare, in the deepest part of the building.

Mare bowed towards the figure and so did the overlords who accompanied him.

The figure that was a couple steps above the ground was a stone statue of the ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, Ainz Ooal Gown. The statue looked extremely realistic, as if Ainz himself had been petrified, and the way it was swinging the staff to the front gave a commanding aura that was befitting of a ruler.

There were numerous offerings laid out in front of the stone statue. From Mare’s point of view, all these offerings were worthless. They were trivial objects such as flowers and fish.

But Mare was not displeased by the offering. The tributes conveyed clear feelings of admiration and worship. For example, the flowers did not grow in the marshes, but in the forest. As the forest was dangerous for lizardmen, someone must have risked his life to get these flowers. Also, the fish were far bigger than the ones the lizardmen ate, and he could tell they had selected the best to offer.

Mare nodded his head in satisfaction. The fact that some rabble from nowhere had finally recognized the greatness of his master made him happy.

“Thanks for the hard work.”

Mare spoke first to the lizardmen who were fidgeting and stealing glances his way. They were there to clean the temple. These were some of the few lizardmen who possessed the abilities of a druid. On their neck was a medal with the guild symbol of Ainz Ooal Gown.

Between them and Mare, their difference in their statuses was like the gulf between the heavens and the earth. Their relationship was that of a ruler and a servant, and there was no need to praise them for their hard work. But due to the reasons previously stated, Mare felt a sense of satisfaction and praised them so.

Mare left behind the lizardmen who were bowing and left the temple with the overlords. What stood before them was the swamp and the lizardmen village. It was more prosperous than before.

Their population had decreased due to the war, but with the five tribes united, they formed a large and healthy village.

Wooden stockades surrounded a large area and though one would wonder how they had managed to erect watchtowers on soft ground, white skeletons, probably Nazarick Old Guarders, stood watch with their bows from the top of the watchtowers. They appeared to be patrolling to ensure no intruders could make their way inside.

“Uhmmm, where would Cocytus-san be?”

Coctyus was easily recognizable in more ways than one. If he was in the village, he would be spotted easily and even if he was in one of the houses, his servants would be standing around outside. Mare had looked around the entire village, but Cocytus was nowhere to be seen.

“Can someone ask where Cocytus-san is?”

“Understood. Please wait a moment.”

One of the overlords, Aurelius, went back inside the temple.

Mare looked at the swamp — the peaceful lizardmen village. There was no sign of anyone being wary of the Nazarick Old Guarders and the lizardmen children did not seem to mind either. They co-existed as if it was natural.

Even though the undead invaded this place and they’re now subjugated, they don’t seem to hold any grudges. Is it because Cocytus-san’s integration policy is working well or are the lizardmen naturally like this?

While Mare was wandering off in thought, Aurelius returned.

“I apologize for making you wait, Mare-sama. The ones working in the temple didn’t know where Cocytus-sama would be. But they said that Shasuryu Shasha… this tribal confederation’s chief might know.”

“T-then, uh, let’s go there.”

Mare and company walked with Aurelius at the head. Rather than cutting through the newly erected lizardmen village on the swamp, they walked along the lakeside. A forest soon appeared and they could spot several Nazarick Old Guarders here and there throughout the forest.

When they came out of the forest, there was another waterfront of a swamp different from the one before. A sizeable construction was underway.

The water was dammed off and close to ten stone golems dug up the dirt and the lizardmen carried off the dirt in a handcart off to somewhere. When Mare was observing and wondering what they were doing, a large lizardman came running out.

The lizardman had a magnificent physique, with scars all over his body. He stood out among the other lizardmen in many ways. The medal on his neck swayed left and right from hurriedly running over.

The medal was the symbol of being a subject and a way to protect them, but the medal itself had no magical properties. The fact they wore it around their neck showed that they were Ainz's "property". Thus, no one under the command of the Great Tomb of Nazarick's Supreme Being was to harm the lizardmen. Of course, if there was a good reason for a lizardman to die, that was a different story. Whether they were lucky or not, lizardmen showed respect to the strong and none dared to step out of the line.

"Welcome, Mare-sama. My name is—"

"Shasuryu Shasha, right?"

"That's right. It's an honour for you to remember me."

"Ah, I heard it from C-cocytus-san… Say, do you know where Cocytus-san is at right now?"

Shasuryu appeared to be deep in thought.

"I believe he headed out with his subordinates to subjugate the Toadmen with a sizeable number of lizardmen for area familiarization."

“Toadmen?”

“They’re demi-humans living in the north eastern side of the lake. They look similar to frogs and aren’t friendly with us. They have the skills to tame large monsters, so they’re a very annoying opponent for us. I heard there was a big war in my father’s time. It seems we suffered a devastating defeat, to a point that one of the tribes had to disband.”

“They sound strong. Fitting for a species living to the north.”

This lake looked as if two lakes were joined together in shape of a gourd. To the south was the smaller lake - where lizardmen lived with roughly half being the swamp and other half being the lake. Since the water level was relatively low, there were not many large monsters. Comparatively, the northern part of the lake was deeper with many gigantic monsters and they tended to be stronger. Of course, from Mare’s point of view, the difference was tiny.

“Aren’t those toadmen actually a species called “Tuveig”?”

They were monsters that lived in the poison swamp that used to surround Nazarick. His sister had tamed a few of them.

“Well, I wouldn’t know something like that. How about asking him directly when he returns? He should be back soon.”

“Then I’ll do that. This is a different topic, but it looks like you’re building something big here. What’s it for? It doesn’t look like a defense system for the village…”

“Yes, we’re building the fourth fish farm.”

Mare understood after Shasuryu explained the details.

It was good that the lizardmen tribes were united, but there was the issue of their food supply. Even though there were many who died in the war, there was limited amount of food they could hunt from this area alone. The solution was to go back all the way to where the old villages used to be and hunt there, but the new overseer of the Lizardmen, Cocytus, did not allow this.

Unlike when moving in large groups, like an entire tribe, when travelling in small numbers, there were chances of being attacked by monsters. Cocytus was worried that the already small number of lizardmen would be reduced even further. So Cocytus tackled the issue of food head-on for the prosperity of the lizardmen.

First, he brought over food from Nazarick — with Ainz’s permission — and distributed it to the lizardmen. Next, he searched for a way to gather food semi-permanently. What naturally caught his attention was Zaryusu’s fish farm. After a discussion with Demiurge, Cocytus went ahead with creating an even more effective fish farm.

The construction of fish farms were being carried out at extreme speed, and there were currently three gigantic fish farms, with this one, the fourth, on the way.

“But you can’t start farming them while they’re hatchlings, right?”

“Yes. Our - no - my younger brother’s knowledge only relates to raising the fish that were somewhat grown already. But Demiurge-sama taught us the basics, so we’re also preparing the fish farm for the hatchlings as well. I predict that within few years, we’ll have doubled the food supply just from the fish farm.”

“I-is that so. In a few years, we won’t need to bring in any fish from Nazarick. And of course, you’ll always be able to get them during an emergency.”

“We are all grateful to Ainz-sama from the bottom of our hearts. It was because he gave us so many fish… Speaking of which, the fish we received had no organs. How did they live? Are they creatures that don’t need food, like some monsters? No, considering they don’t have any bones as well…”

“It’s food made by the Supreme Beings like Ainz-sama.”

What Cocytus brought over was food made with item called “Dagda’s Cauldron”.

“Is that true! He could create enough fish for all of us to eat!”

Shasuryu shook his head.

“When Zaryusu and others staying over at the great castle came back for a bit, they told stories of a dream-like world. They told of the various worlds in the Great Tomb of Nazarick, like a true realm of a god. Does Ainz-sama possess the power of a god?”

“Of course?”

Mare wondered why this lizardman was asking an obvious question. A surprised expression appeared on his face.

After all, Ainz Ooal Gown was the greatest of the gods and was his creator.

“Is that so. This is all thanks to Ainz-sama. Thank you.”
“Alright. I’ll convey your thanks to him.”

Side 2 (2/2)

プレアデス
Πλειάδες

Part 3

Nazarick Time 10:30

“You’re making too much noise. Quiet down.”

Ainz motioned with his left hand, and held that pose.

He took a step back and returned to his original stance.

“You’re making too much noise. Quiet down.”

Once again, he motioned with his left hand and froze mid-pose. He checked the reflection of himself in the mirror and slightly adjusted the position of his left hand.

“...Good? ...Is this the spot? No... Would it be cooler if I extended my hand a bit more to the left?”

He returned to his initial position.

“You’re making too much noise. Quiet down.”

Finally satisfied with the pose, Ainz grabbed the memo pad on the table beside him.

“Since I’ve finished the pose... I should work on the lines while I have extra time.”

He circled the phrase he was practicing earlier and flipped a page. The majority of the sentences written on the page were variations on the phrase “I shall consider it.” The phrases that were too over-the-top and thus unusable were all crossed out.

For Ainz, who used to be an average person, acting like a leader was difficult. Thus, he repeatedly practiced playing that role just in case a situation called for it. Of course, the entire memo pad was filled with phrases Ainz came up with.

Even though an hour had passed since Ainz started practicing, he did not require any rest.

Ainz was the supreme overlord, but in reality, he barely did anything. Unless there were important decisions or emergency situation that required his leadership, there was nothing to do. Albedo took care of all the details and all Ainz had to do was skim through the reports.

Since there was never anything in the reports that required his attention, he really just skimmed through them all. It was not an attitude befitting a ruler, but as long as Albedo was around, and there was no emergency, there would be no problem.

All proper organizations should be like this anyways. It’s not good for someone who stands above others to work on the frontlines.

It was a foolish move for the supreme commander of an army to participate in the fight on the frontlines unless he was there to raise morale. It was because there were incalculable dangers.

I should give up this adventurer business and gather knowledge to deal with emergency situations— I know I have to train my mind as well, but what should I do? Who's going to be the teacher...? How can I not ruin the image of Ainz Ooal Gown that everybody believes in…

Everyone inside Nazarick respected Ainz as the supreme overlord and kneeled before him. That was right. Ainz received respect from his subordinates which his former comrades created, who were, in some ways, their children. Just like how a father could not betray his son's admiration, he could not betray them as well. That was why he practiced acting, in the hope that he could at least appear to play the part.

Ainz was fully aware that it was embarrassing. Otherwise, why would he lock the door and forbid the maids and the Eight Edge Assassins that guarded him from entering? Sometimes, he would even plant his face in the pillow and scream "Arrrgghhh—-!" when he could not stand it anymore.

"Something fitting the supreme overlord of Nazarick... A figure that's respected..."

Ainz flipped the page while feeling like he was coughing up blood. There were plenty more lines he came up with in his spare time, and it felt like the finish line was still somewhere beyond the horizon.

Ainz Ooal Gown was undead and emotions over a certain threshold were suppressed. But —

“I need a break...”

The consciousness of Suzuki Satoru was weary from mental fatigue and screamed out loud. He shouted that he did not want it anymore.

But from Ainz’s tightly clenched jaws came a different sound.

“What are you doing? I need to work harder.”

Ainz flagellated himself for wanting to avoid all this, and his eyes regained their strength. He looked into the mirror.

Suddenly, a digital “pipipipipi” noise rang out.

The source was the bracelet on his left arm. It was a heavenly sound to Ainz. He turned off the sudden beeping and let out a big sigh.

“If time’s up, then it can’t be helped. Yes, time’s up.”

Ainz returned the memo pad to a box. When he closed the lid, he could hear the sound of several locks engaging. If someone tried to forcefully open the box, it would trigger an extensive array of attack spells, all of which would be centered on the box to destroy it. Unless it was someone with a level 90 with a rogue class job or a character over level 80 with full specialization as a rogue, it was near impossible to open it. It was that secure of a box.

Only after sealing the memo pad with such secure item, he put the item in the pocket space. His pocket space also had countless other rare items. However, a high level thief would be able to steal items from it. Just because a rogue could, did not mean said rogue could just immobilize his opponents and rob them dry. The limit would have been one or two items per player. Still, the possibility of being robbed even once or twice made Ainz —who should experience no fear as he was undead— shudder in terror.

In this New World, there were unknown factors such as talents as well. That was why he placed the box in such a way so that others would go for the rare items instead of the box. After he stored it, he checked again. He checked the box repeatedly like a housewife making sure the door was locked before leaving on a trip. Only after he satisfied himself that it was there did he allow himself to sigh in relief.

Ainz finally left his bedroom. The place he was headed to was the room he regularly used as the study. The ones who bowed deeply to him there were the regular maid, Albedo, and Mare.

There was nothing surprising about the maid or Albedo being there, but he was surprised that Mare, who very rarely came around, was there. Ainz cut across the room, turned around at the table and sat in a motion that he had practiced for over thirty times. The key point was not to step on the robe or not push the chair out of the way.

The next pose he took was one that had him lean back in the chair. It would not look good if he leaned back too far or too far. The kings had a kingly way of — maybe — sitting down.

I don’t know how kings take a seat... I should talk with a king from somewhere...

It was recommended for company men to lightly sit in the middle of the chair without leaning on the backrest. But Ainz Ooal Gown was no longer a company man.

Thus, Ainz practiced the postures of the ideal king in his mind.

“Raise your heads.”

The three raised their heads. The fact they would not raise their heads without a command felt like a waste of time, but he could not ignore their intention of wanting to display their utmost loyalty every time. That was why Ainz controlled himself and went through the same ritual every time.

“Then I shall ask you first, Mare. What is your business?”

“Ah, yes!”

Whether it was because he was nervous, Mare let out a squeaky voice. Ainz smiled, but since there were no muscles on his face, nothing moved. However, it still made the atmosphere seem warmer. As if sensing this, Mare breathed easier. He seemed less tense as well.

“I, uh, brought that, uh, thing.”

Ainz did not go “What are you talking about?” like a boss with a bad personality. Instead, he simply took it from Mare. It was because of the possibility that he could have forgotten what he had ordered.

“Is that so —- No, it’s fine.”

Ainz stopped the maid who was preparing to receive the object from Mare with a wave of his hand.

“Mare, bring it directly to me.”

“Yes!”

Mare straightened his back, approached Ainz and presented a folder to him. Ainz slowly opened the folder.

This… it’s the memo folder.

All three Guardians had taken up Ainz’s offer and circled the “Participating” box.

“Considering the order of names, it would’ve been fine if Cocytus’ subordinate came instead. You worked hard, Mare.”

“No, no. I’m happy to serve! Besides, since Cocytus-san was working, I came here instead. Plus—”

Mare gently caressed the ring on his left ring finger. It was an action filled with care and love.

…Ring of Ainz Ooal Gown. I’m happy that he likes it, but wearing on that finger is a bit... And why is he looking at me with that kind of look…

Ainz felt a sudden chill and glanced over at Albedo. She had her usual beautiful smile on her face.

Ainz looked at her left ring finger. Just like Mare, there was a ring there, like that was the right place for rings to be.

What was it, an ancient Greek story?

He remembered hearing that putting rings on different fingers meant different things from Yamaiko in the past.

There was a vein leading directly to the heart in the left ring finger or something, right? They would also mix medicine with the left ring finger because if there was something poisonous in there, it would affect the heart... does the sous-

chef do something like that, too? Ah, I got distracted... They’re still looking at me.

Ainz clasped both his hands on top of the desk.

“What’s wrong, Mare? What are you looking at? Is there something funny on my face?”

Ainz took the greatest of pains to make sure those words did not come out in a mean manner.

“N-no. Nothing like that. I just thought Ainz-sama was cool...”

“I’m... cool?”

Ainz unconsciously stroked his skeletal face.

“Ahhahah... Mare, you’re quite good with flattery.”

“It’s not flattery!”

It was a loud voice that nobody would have thought would have come from Mare.

“I-I apologize. But, I really thought Ainz-sama was cool. Even when you were sitting down, it was a movement truly befitting the Supreme

Overlord of Nazarick.”

Ainz looked at the maid in a questioning manner, and the homunculus nodded in agreement as if she understood what Ainz was asking. Albedo vigorously nodded up and down as well, despite not being asked. In fact, her wings flapped up and down as well.

“Is that so? I’m glad to hear that.”

After Ainz’s short answer, he stood and walked up to Mare. As he stood in front of the boy who was petrified and wondering if he would be scolded, Ainz instead gently caressed his head. It was a rough, but gentle gesture.

“A-Ainz-sama...”

“Thank you, Mare. Your words always make me happy.”

He did not reveal Suzuki Satoru’s embarrassment.

“I have always felt that I need to thank my comrades.”

“The other Supreme Beings?”

Ainz kneeled to look Mare eye-to-eye.

“That’s right. I’m thankful that they created this Great Tomb of Nazarick and that they created you, Mare and everybody else. All of you — obviously including you, Albedo and Sixth.”

Albedo’s wings spread wide, as if she was about to climax. Also, the maid who was suddenly addressed by name looked as if she did not know what to do. She was usually calm and collected, but this side of her made Ainz laugh heartily.

“All of you are my treasures.”

Ainz lifted up Mare as if letting him ride on the shoulders.

“I don’t even want to hand you over to Bukubukuchagama-san.”

“I am honoured, Ainz-sama.”

Sixth, who thanked Ainz on Mare’s behalf, had tears of joy flowing down her face.

“On behalf of Nazarick, I thank you for remaining here with us, out of all the Supreme Beings. I know that there are many instances where we have displeased you and you have found us lacking. I know it is rude to ask this of the creator, but please allow us to serve you loyally!”

“I will allow this. I said something like this to Albedo and Demiurge in the past —- I am the master of the Great Tomb of Nazarick and your liege, Ainz Ooal Gown.”

Ainz was surprised that he was so comfortable saying these things that he had not prepared for. Though in a way, it was not that surprising, because all he had done was vocalize how he truly felt.

Mare hugged Ainz and buried his face in Ainz’s shoulder. A calm voice in Ainz’s mind said that it was a good thing he was not in his usual attire. A warm, wet sensation came from the shoulder of his robes, but Ainz let Mare cry. After the sniffling noise died down a little, he lowered Mare to the ground while softly petting him on the head.

Ainz took out a handkerchief from his pocket to clean Mare’s face. Since he had never done this for someone else before, he ended up being a bit rougher than he expected, but Mare stood still and let Ainz do as he pleased.

“Then, go wash your face, Mare.”

“W-what about Ainz-sama?”

“Hmm. I need to go to E-Rantel now. I have a meeting with the Guild Master. I rejected it so far because it was annoying, but I can’t put it off any more. If not—”

Ainz looked at Albedo, who was standing in silence. It was difficult to tell what expression she was making because her long hair was covering the face. But the fact she was trembling ever so slightly made him afraid. It resembled a volcano brimming with rage right before the eruption.

“What is it, Albedo?”

In that moment—

“—Ku. Ha!”

—Ainz’s field of vision suddenly shifted, and he felt something hit his back.

It did not hurt, since Ainz would only take damage from something with magical properties. It was just a shock light enough to tell him that he hit something in the back, but nothing that was close to being painful. However, the reaction of Ainz’s human side made him blink his lidless eyes for a second.

The situation was so sudden that Ainz could not think clearly for a moment. Since his undead mind was immune to confusion, it must have been Suzuki Satoru who was flustered.

“Mm, umm.”

When he opened his eyes, the Eight Edge Assassins came into view.

Ainz understood that he was somehow lying on the floor and tried to get up, but he could barely move due to something soft and mysterious holding him down.

How is this possible? I have restrain resistance and other movement hindrance resistance items. The moment I was completely immobilized, I should have been freed... This means the opponent has high level restrain skill!

Ainz looked at the creature that was trying to restrain him and confirmed that it was Albedo, as he had suspected.

“Ainz-samaaaaa!”

After straddling Ainz with both legs and firmly mounting him she raised her upper body.

“W-what is it? What’s the matter?!”

“I don’t need to... hold it in anymore, right!”

Albedo opened her eyes wide. Her pupils that seemed to split her golden irises apart gave Ainz a chilling sensation down his back.

“W-what are you talking about?!”

Ainz panicked, but Albedo ignored him and put her hands on her dress, closing her fingers around the slit of her cleavage. With a grunted “Hmph!” she tried to rip it apart, but the material did not budge.

“Magical clothing is annoying. I should use an item destruction skill or just take it off normally.”

“Get a hold of yourself, Albedo. Get down from me right this instant!”

He tried to push her off by force, but the opponent was a level 100 warrior. Plus, he could not use his full strength because he was grabbing something extremely soft while trying to push her off. Albedo’s hands closed in and tried to open up Ainz’s robe.

“Don’t try to take off my clothes! Don’t move your hips! Oi!”

“Ah. Awawawawawawa...”

“It’s your fault, Ainz-sama! I held it in so far, but you started saying things that I can’t hold myself anymore! It’s all Ainz-sama’s fault! I just need a little bit! Just a little bit! Really, a little bit! Please, give me some of your favour! It’ll be over by the time you’re finished counting the number of Eight Edge Assassins on the ceiling!”

If she had mentioned that it was Ainz’s fault for changing her setting, he would have lost all will to resist. However, Albedo looked like she was about to devour Ainz whole and the fear of being eaten, like that of prey being cornered by a predator, overrode Ainz’s guilt and he struggled against her.

Finally, his subordinates, who were confused at this sudden situation, sprang into action.

“Albedo-sama has lost her mind!”

“Albedo-sama has lost her mind!”

The Eight Edge Assassins jumped off the ceiling simultaneously.

“Get her off Ainz-sama! No, no! Don’t try to restrain her with skills! It’s just going to get cancelled! Use your strength!”

“It’s too much! To be this strong, she is indeed the Overseer of Guardians! Mare-sama, help us!”

“—Awawa! Y-yes!”

Ainz fixed his clothing after being finally liberated and pointed to Albedo, who was being held by all four limbs by the Eight Edged Assassins.

“Albedo shall be grounded for three days.”

The Eight Edged Assassins dragged Albedo out of the room.

“U-uh, Ainz-sama... Are you alright?”

“I’m fine… But when did Albedo turn so weird? Did she eat something bad…? Devils don’t need to eat food, but there shouldn’t be a problem with eating... right?”

Mare looked away as Ainz asked the question.

“Well… I guess, uh, mmm, there would have been this and that happening for her. She must have been under a lot of work-related stress.”

Ainz stood up from his place and called over the maid. To regain his dignity, he spoke in the most regal voice he could manage.

“...Tell Narberal and Hamsuke to prepare. It’s time to head to E-Rantel.”

♦♦♦

Nazarick Time 13:35

Sitting on top of Hamsuke, Ainz pulled the reins to signal him to halt. He looked over E-Rantel’s gate which stood strong in front of him. Ainz did not dislike the gate, which could easily stop an entire army and radiated power and gravity. In Yggdrasil, there were many gates larger and more magnificent than this one, but unlike simple data, this gate was made with human hands —though the possible help of magic could not be discounted— and sweat. Standing before the steely gate steeped in history and labour, an indescribable emotion welled up from inside him.

There were guilds that conquered and used a city as their base in Yggdrasil. I used to wonder why they would set up a base in areas so difficult to defend... but I think I can understand now. Ruling a great city might be the dream of any man.

Back in Yggdrasil, it was a common occurrence for different guilds to lay siege to a city. Most members of Ainz Ooal Gown could not understand why they would do that, but there were also few members who said they wanted to try it as well.

Warmongers...

It was not a good label, but looking back, it was a good memory.

“What is it, my lord?”

“Nothing. Don’t worry about it.”

Hamsuke asked because her master had halted and took no further action. Ainz replied in a plain tone, as though trying to change the topic. It was a voice to hide his embarrassment about the fact he was caught up in the memories of good old days.

“Then, let’s go to the Adventurer’s Guild and get some monster subjugation quests.”

They could book a room for the night in E-Rantel, but they could not afford to waste the money. The only reason Ainz, who did not need sleep or food, stayed at a high-class inn was to show off his status as the highest-ranked adventurer in the city and to make connections. However, he was already acquainted with all the relevant authorities and would be welcomed should he ever visit them. Thus, there was no need to stay at an inn any more.

Plus, even when he did stay at an inn, he would teleport to Nazarick and create undead until morning anyways. Since there was no point in lingering, it would be wiser to take a quest and leave the city quickly.

In truth, he had begun to think that there was no longer any value in staying around E-Rantel.

“Is that so? My lord seems to enjoy fighting.”

“I don’t particularly enjoy it. Even if I do accept a subjugation quest, I’ll just mop it up quickly and spend most of the time in Nazarick as usual.”

Ainz lightly tapped Hamsuke’s gigantic head.

“We also need to train you to equip weapons and armour.”

“I always train hard! Those lizardmen taught me a lot, my lord. Soon I will even be able to use an ultimate strike!”

“If you can use martial arts, that would be perfect. What about your comrade who’s training alongside you? Do you think he can use martial arts as well?”

“That fellow? He does not speak, so I would not know. Though I feel he would be a long way from being able to do so.”

Ainz did not think “it” would be able to talk either. The possibility that it would be able to use martial arts was also close to zero. It was an experiment. If Ainz’s Death Knight could learn warrior-class skills, the plan would be changed immediately. If it could get stronger from training, it could be a matter of utmost priority.

“The undead do not require rest or sleep. Since it can train continuously, it should have learned martial arts faster than Hamsuke. But since it still hasn’t learned anything, it appears to be a failure.”

“Wait my lord! He’s trying very hard as well! Day after day, even after this king had gone to bed… I beseech thee to not kill him!”

“...Who said anything about killing? What kind of evil being do you think I am?”

“That is right! There is none in this world who is as generous as you are, Ainz-sama! He even spared a pathetically weak creature like you.”

Those chilling words flew from Narberal, who was riding just behind, and Hamsuke shook her body.

“—Nabe, we’ll be arriving at E-Rantel soon, so call me Momon.”

“As you command.”

“And Hamsuke is a vital part of the plan to strengthen Nazarick… Make sure you treat those who work for Nazarick accordingly. Let me remind you that Hamsuke isn’t the only one I’m talking about.”

“Yes! I apologize.”

He also wanted to tell her to stop calling the humans names like “tick” or “flea”, but she didn’t listen and he had stopped trying entirely. If it was Narberal Gamma’s setting to call the humans such names unconsciously, he did not want trample on the hard work and devotion of his comrades.

“Well, let’s go.”

“Understood!”

Hamsuke strode forward with Ainz on top.

There were several people standing in line by the gate. Entering the city was much stricter than leaving and all cargos were searched thoroughly. Thus, it often took a while for peddlers or wandering merchants to get to their turn for inspection.

“Doesn’t seem like it’ll take too long…”

There were several travellers in the line, along with an armed group who looked like adventurers. Narberal asked quietly when Ainz stood behind them.

“Momon sam—san, can we not go ahead first?”

She was right. When Ainz first arrived, he had to go through thorough and annoying inspections, but as he became more famous, the inspections became simpler and nowadays he had a free pass. Not only that, they often passed him through before others.

It was not that “Darkness” was special, but all adventurers over Mithril rank were treated like this. It was to make sure they did not displease or inconvenience what could be dubbed the “city’s secret weapons”.

They should just exempt us from entrance fee as well...

It was a tiny amount of what he had earned through adventuring, but this was the number one source of money for Nazarick. Still, he did not consider using ‘Flight’ to just get over the walls.

Momon was a hero. Thus—

“We will not cut in line... Unless there’s an emergency or something that needs to be done quickly.”

Narberal replied with her head bowed while Ainz stared in front, zoned out on top of the Hamsuke.

“The line doesn’t look like it’s moving...”

The line stayed still, as though there was a traffic jam on the road.

“What is that…? They’re checking a wagon… Checking it really thoroughly. No, they’re just surrounding it and not checking it. Did they find something illegal? Excuse me.”

Ainz asked the gruff-looking guy standing in front of him.

“Ah, yes, what is it?”

“No need to be flustered. It just looked like the line wasn’t moving, so I’m wondering what’s going on.”

“I don’t know the details, but I saw this young lady going towards the checkpoint with some soldiers. Then suddenly—”

Even though he heard the summary, it was hard to discern the details. Ainz stuck his head out and listened in towards the direction of the check point. He could hear a loud shout when he listened carefully.

Hmmm.

Ainz’s curiosity was stimulated.

When he first arrived at E-Rantel, he was asked several questions as well, but in the end he could enter easily. He almost felt that guards were rather friendly towards common folk like adventurers and travellers. There was probably a real reason why they were friendly to him, but what kind of interrogation was that country girl undergoing?

Because his adamantite rank was universal in nature, there were few cities which would not allow Ainz inside. So Ainz wanted to know what they were asking her. In the future, he might need to infiltrate a city as someone who was not an adamantite-ranked adventurer, Momom. To avoid any problems which might result at that point, he wanted to be prepared.

“Wait here. I’ll check it out.”

“I shall go with you.”

“There’s no need. I’ll be very brief.”

All the soldiers who spotted Ainz shouted out in surprise. In E-Rantel, there was not a single person who did not know of the adamantite-ranked adventurer, Momon.

Ainz put special care into appearing confident as he approached the checkpoint. Inside was an agitated magic caster, a soldier and a country girl sitting on a chair.

“We want to enter the city as quickly as possible… but what’s the matter?”

“Uwaaah!”

The two men screamed out in surprise like the soldiers on the outside and the country girl looked over in his direction with a stupefied expression.

“M-Momon-sama! I apologize!”

“What are you... Hm? She’s...”

It was a familiar face. He felt as if he had seen her before and he racked his brain —even though he did not have one— for information about her.

“Yes! We were investigating this suspicious girl, so it took some time. We apologize for inconveniencing you, Momon-sama—”

Ainz remembered the girl's name while thinking that the man’s voice was distracting.

“—Enri. Yeah, you’re Enri Emmot, correct?”

“Uh, I’m sorry but who… Ah, that’s right. You came to the village with Enfi. I don’t remember talking with you… Did you hear my name from Enfi?”

Ainz froze unintentionally.

The one who met with Enri was the masked magic caster, Ainz Ooal Gown. Right now, he was the adamantite-ranked adventurer wearing pitch black armour, Momon.

Damn it! I said it out loud without thinking. Crap, I need to leave here quickly. But why is she here? If she was looking for me— no, looking for Ainz Ooal Gown, is something wrong? I need to hear about the details.

Considering what she had just said, it was not likely that she had discovered his true identity, but he needed to take the possibility that he had been discovered into consideration. Even if she could not tell that Ainz and Momon was the same person by comparing the voice from several months ago to what was coming out through the helmet now, there was nothing to lose by being careful.

Ainz called over the magic caster with a beckoning gesture. The magic caster would know more about the situation than the soldier.

He took the magic caster outside the checkpoint, far away enough so that nobody else could listen in the conversation.

“So... She’s a friend of a friend of mine. Can you tell me what happened?”

Technically, it wasn’t a lie since Nfirea was both Ainz and Momon’s acquaintance.

The magic caster opened his eyes wide. His expression was similar to surprise, but it was subtly different. One might compare it to a strand of string connecting to another. It was like he had solved a puzzle.

“Is that so… Of course…”

He wanted to tell the magic caster to stop talking to himself, but Ainz waited for him to speak.

“I thought she was a simple countryside girl, but she was carrying a powerful magic item in the shape of a horn. So I was going to find out how she came into possession of such a powerful item among other things.”

“What kind of horn was it? And its effects?”

“The effects were—”

Ainz looked up into the sky after hearing the whole story. He wanted to avoid the situation because he realized he had given that item to her.

He had given Enri that item for her to protect herself, without knowing that this kind of item was abnormal in this world. He did not imagine that it would cause her trouble. He could make excuses, saying that it was not his fault, but he could not just abandon her either.

Should I help? I’m not at fault, the one who has the item should be responsible… But it’d be troublesome if that item went into someone else’s hands. Plus, if she gets arrested…

Nfirea knew that Ainz and Momon were the same person. If he heard about this situation from her later on, he would think that Ainz had abandoned her.

There’s definitely going to be a problem… It doesn’t matter what happens to other useless humans, but he’s a valuable one. There’s a saying, “turn obstacles into opportunities”. If I help her, Nfirea will be thankful and I’ll be able to chain him down with obligation.

Ainz spoke in a tone that he thought sounded very insightful.

“There’s no need to worry about it. I know very well what kind of person she is. She’s definitely not someone who would cause trouble, so please let her go. Can you do that?”

“Of course. If it’s an acquaintance of Momon from ‘Darkness’, even a criminal would be able to enter the city freely if you vouched for them.”

“Is that so. Then, I’m sorry to ask this of you, but please let her in. And I apologize once again, but can you let us, ‘Darkness’, in as well?”

♦♦♦

Ainz returned to Narberal and Hamsuke with the permit.

“I have the permit. Let’s go in.”

He passed by those standing while riding on top of Hamsuke. He had grabbed the attention of those waiting, but after they spotted the black armour, giant swords, Hamsuke and Narberal, they looked away, as though they had accepted it. They were keenly aware of the clear difference in status between them and Ainz.

He entered E-Rantel while receiving deep, respectful bows from the soldiers.

“Nabe, I have something to request of you.”

“I stand ready to receive any command.”

It was little unsightly for an adventuring comrade to show such signs of loyalty in middle of a city, but Ainz knew it was useless, so he continued.

“A girl called Enri will shortly pass the gate with a cart. Go and discreetly ask her why she’s in E-Rantel.”

Next, Ainz looked for a place to hide himself. It was to avoid further conversation with Enri.

He looked around and decided that a nearby stack of wooden boxes were high enough for him to hide behind and ordered Hamsuke there. The soldiers who were working behind the boxes were surprised by Ainz and Hamsuke’s sudden appearance.

“Soldiers, a moment of your time, if I may? I am curious as to what’s in these boxes.”

Ainz confirmed that he was not visible from the gate and asked the soldiers. In reality, he had no interest in the wooden boxes, but only asked because he did not want to get kicked out as a hindrance.

“Ah, yes, it’s an honour for Momon of Darkness to take interest. This is a vegetable named ‘kinshu’ from Grandel. This is—”

Ainz replied with “Is that so” or “Interesting” to the soldier who explained earnestly. His replies were insincere, but the soldier ignored it and carried on. After Ainz had learned quite a lot on how to cook kinshu, Nabe appeared from behind him.

“—I’m sorry to cut you off. Your explanations were very helpful, but my comrade is back, so please excuse me.”

Ainz announced to the soldier and trotted off on Hamsuke.

“So, what did she say?”

“She first wants me to convey her thanks to Momon-san. She had three objectives. First was to sell the herbs she gathered, the second was to check if anyone at the temple wanted to immigrate and the third was to go to the Adventurer’s Guild.”

“Adventurer’s Guild? What kind of quest is she trying to put in?”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t ask her that. Should I find her and beat her until she spills the beans?”

“No, don’t do that. We need to go to the Adventurer’s Guild anyways. We should be able to find out through the guild.”

It was probably not something like wanting to thank Ainz Ooal Gown directly. If that was the case, Lupusregina visited the village regularly—

“Speaking of which, Nabe. Did you receive any special report from Lupusregina?”

Ainz frowned —even though he did not have any skin on his face— when he saw Narberal shake her head.

Originally, he had stationed the Shadow Demons at Carne Village, but for the purpose of building a good relationship with them, he had sent Lupusregina instead. He had ordered her to send a report if any problem occurred, but there was not any report so far. So he decided there was nothing problematic happening over at Carne village thus far.

There would not have been a need to report that Enri went to E-Rantel alone, but uneasiness sprouted like clouds deep inside Ainz.

“I thought of Lupusregina as a hard worker. What do you think, Narberal?”

“It is as you say. It might be easy to think of her as insincere due to her way of speaking, but it’s an act. She is an excellent maid who is brutal and cunning.”

Calling someone brutal and cunning was hardly a compliment. Ainz glanced over at Nabe’s face to make sure it was not something she said because she did not hold Lupusregina in high regard, but saw only respect and admiration.

“Then is it alright to head to the Adventurer’s Guild, my lord?”

“Of course. You know the place, right? Then Nabe, hop on behind. There’s no need to take out “Statue of Animal: Warhorse” again.”

As soon as Ainz grabbed Narberal’s hand and pulled her up, Hamsuke launched forward as if she had been waiting for it. Ainz no longer felt ashamed of riding Hamsuke around the city. He rather liked how he could talk and give commands to it. It felt like a taxi.

The Adventurer’s Guild came into view, as well as the sight of Enri entering with her cart.

“...Guess it can’t be helped. We’ll use the back door. Hamsuke, go around the back.”

“As you command, my lord!”

Normally, adventurers were not allowed to use the back door, but adamantite adventurers were allowed to do pretty much anything they pleased. It was still the first time he used the back door though. Excessively using his privileges just because he was special would only tarnish his reputation.

He asked the first guild clerk he met after going through the back door to be guided to the guild master. Fortunately, or not, the guild master was in his room.

“Oh, Momon! Welcome!”

The guildmaster, Ainzack, welcomed him with arms wide open. He grabbed Ainz just like that and hugged him. It did not matter too much since he wore his armour and helmet, but if he had worn thin clothes, it was the kind of passionate embrace that he wanted to avoid for more than one reason. There was a light pat on the back before the guildmaster slowly broke off.

“It’s been lonely because you haven’t come around recently. Now, now, take a seat. We’ll talk for a bit while we wait for the members to arrive for the meeting.”

The guildmaster pointed towards the couch with an expression of greeting an old friend.

“Thank you.”

After Ainz had sat down, the guildmaster sat beside him. The distance between the two of them was short and it felt like a suffocatingly short distance, with their knees almost touching each other.

“Momon, we’ve known each other for a long time now. How about speaking informally now?”

“No, there needs to be formality even amongst friends. I was taught that this was something very important.”

When he was actually at work, he responded more kindly and even talked informally to show some familiarity, but Ainz had no intention to do something like that with the guildmaster. He decided it was the right answer to keep their relationship strictly professional.

Being too closely entangled with an organization will cause problems. As an adventurer, I don’t want to be too closely associated with a city. It’s about time that I found somewhere else to be. But before that…

Ainz peered at the guildmaster through the slit in his visor.

Why does he have to sit beside me? Isn’t that normally Narberal’s place? Having him sit there is weird.

Their proximity made Ainz feel uncomfortable, and it made him question the guildmaster’s sexuality.

I heard from the leader of the Magician’s Association that the guildmaster has a wife… or is that just a sham? Although it seems like he’s just trying to deepen our relationship… there must be some kind of ulterior motive behind it. Or maybe he thinks I play for the other team?

The very thought made Ainz break out in nonexistent goosebumps.

Ainz was strictly heterosexual… or rather, he used to be. As an aside, Suzuki Satoru was a fan of big breasts. That trait endured even into his current existence as an undead being. Rather than, say, Cocytus, Ainz felt more desire for Albedo.

Ainz shifted his seat away from the guildmaster and turned so that he was looking the man face to face.

"Forgive my rudeness. In truth, I came here to ask a favour of you. One of my friends has come to the Adventurer's Guild with a request. Could you tell me what that request is about?"

"About that… well, by the rules, we're not allowed to disclose the details."

"Even so, I still need your help. I know this is unfair of me, and I know that rules exist for a reason. But still, I hope that you—"

Ainz lowered his head, and the guildmaster crossed his arms. He stared at the ceiling with a stern expression on his face.

However, that passed in moments.

"I understand," the guildmaster said to Ainz. "I can't refuse Momon-kun's request. Then, can you tell me this friend's name?"

“She is Enri of Carne Village— no, her name is Enri Emmot.”

“Enri, is it? Well then, please wait for me.”

After a while, the guildmaster returned to the room, followed by a female receptionist he had seen before. Her body was stiff, as though it was made of ice, and she entered the room in an unnatural way.

“Please excuse the disturbance, Momon-sama!”

This was the first time Ainz had seen someone move so awkwardly, raising their right arm with their right leg. Although he was thinking “Wow, that’s… sad” or “You don’t need to be so stiff, do you?” he maintained his resolute attitude and nodded sagely. The need to maintain one’s dignity was the burden of those with an adamantite rank.

“She attended to the request from Enri Emmot of Carne Village. It would be better if you asked her directly. Please, ask anything of her that you need.”

“About that… then— no, before that, guildmaster, please tell her to have a seat. I’m not the owner of this room, but still...”

“No! That would be overstepping my bounds! I’ll stand, thank you very much!”

To Suzuki Satoru, it felt wrong to have his counterpart standing while he sat. However, for Ainz Ooal Gown, the ruler of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick… it wasn't a problem at all. With that, he could easily deal with the differences between a leader and a follower. It would seem his daily practice had not been wasted after all. Indeed, it felt like he had slowly increased his experience total.

...How much more XP until I level up, hm?

"Is that so? Well then, let's begin. Please tell me, in detail, about the request she made. Since this is very important, I hope there will be no omissions."

"Y-yes!"

Sticky sweat beaded on the receptionist's forehead.

"What's wrong? Is something the matter?"

"No, it's…"

The receptionist's gaze was flickering back and forth.

"Am I asking the wrong questions? ...Well, that might be so. Then, let me ask; was it a request to find someone?"

“No, i-it’s not like that…”

“Ah, then what *is* it like? Was it not a request, then?”

“...Actually, it was more of a consultation for a future request. It concerned monsters called the Giant of the East and the Serpent of the West, monsters of the same level as the Wise King of the Forest that Momon-sama tamed. That, er, was it, I think.”

Momon considered that being too direct and forceful would only scare the receptionist, and continued asking.

“Then, will this be a problem in the future?”

“N-no! I-I didn’t know she was a friend of Momon-sama! If I had known I would have gotten more details from her! It’s true!”

The sight of the receptionist on the verge of tears perturbed Ainz. Could someone with so little control over their emotions work as a receptionist?

“—Guildmaster…”

“...Forgive me, I have not instructed my subordinates well enough.”

“But, no! That was the guild’s rule!”

After listening to the two of them, Ainz realized that they might have gotten the wrong impression. They thought that since Enri and Ainz knew each other, Ainz could have taken the request for free, but as a way of saving the Adventurer's Guild's face, Enri had come to request via the guild.

But the receptionist had treated Enri coldly and kicked her out due to monetary issues. They were arguing over who was responsible for slamming the door on an adamantite-ranked adventurer's friend.

But… wouldn't that be the right thing to do, according to the guild rules?

Ainz turned a disapproving eye to the guildmaster, who was chastising the receptionist.

It's the duty of a superior to protect their subordinates when they make mistakes. Or perhaps he's putting on a big show of scolding her in front of a customer to win sympathy for her? What a masterful technique… looks like he's really getting into it.

To Ainz, the receptionist had done the right thing. The guildmaster probably thought so, too. However, be it Ainz's entry through the back door or his audience with the guildmaster, it would all be forgiven because he was an adamantite-ranked adventurer. It was because adamantite-ranked adventurers were worth keeping around.

"But I really didn't know!"

With the receptionist almost in tears, Ainz cut in with gentle words.

“You were not wrong.”

The receptionist’s eyes went wide in surprise, and the accumulated tears finally fell.

“It’s very important to obey the organization’s rules. While there are times when they should be bent, I won’t hold this incident against you.”

“Thank you very much! Thank you very, very much!”

“Although it might be troublesome, please tell me the details of her request. This isn’t a formal acceptance of the request, but rather, it’s so that it’s easier for me to take action should the situation call for it.”

“I understand! I’ll go get the details from her right away! Then, please excuse me!”

The receptionist fled from the room at top speed, as though a typhoon had passed through.

“...Even if you want to gain my sympathy, please don’t scold innocent people. It upsets me.”

“...As I thought, I can’t put anything past you, Momon-kun.”

The guildmaster’s sincere reply told Ainz that his hypothesis had been correct.

It seems the tricks of the Japanese salaryman can be used anywhere. Then, the question is—

The image of Lupusregina appeared in Ainz’s mind.

How did Lupusregina not know of the monsters that a village girl like Enri was aware of? Was there a failure in establishing an information network? I need to check this out.

I have to return to Nazarick soon, Ainz thought as he awaited the receptionist’s report.

♦♦♦

Nazarick Time 16:41

A worried Lupusregina entered Ainz’s office. The panic and unease of being suddenly summoned was written all over her face. Inside the office was Lupusregina, the regular maid Sixth, the battle maid Narberal, Aura, who was the one most familiar with the forest, the Eight Edge Assassins on the ceiling, and the owner of the room, Ainz.

By the way, Albedo was still in confinement.

Lupusregina was about to prostrate before Ainz when he interrupted her.

“Lupusregina, is there something you’ve kept from me?”

After seeing the confused look on her face, he wondered if she did not know about it after all. Ainz decided to repeat what he had heard about the Giant of the East and the Serpent of the West from the Adventurer’s Guild. However, as Lupusregina seemed to have known about this long before, Ainz’s mood changed drastically. He exhaled long and loud.

“So you were aware of this, then?”

“Yes. About that—”

“You fool!”

Ainz’s thunderous shout, filled with wrath, seemed to shake the very room. As the others recoiled like they had been physically struck, Ainz felt something suppress his emotions, but even after the peak of rage was cut off, his anger surged up again, and there was no way he could fully rein in his ire.

“Why did you not report this to me? Were you trying to deceive me?”

“N-no! Nothing like that!”

“Then why? Why did none of this reach me at all! What was the reason?”

“B-because I th-thought it wasn’t a big deal, s-so I didn’t report…”

For some reason, the sight of the frightened battle maid peeking up at him only incensed him further.

“Lupusregina Beta! I am thoroughly disappointed in you!!”

Lupusregina was not the only one who flinched at this. Nabe and Sixth were trembling too, and the Eight Edge Assassins on the ceiling seemed to have froze up as well.

“I gave you the task of taking care of the village, but that did not mean you could do as you please! You were told to report anything that happened in the village, anything at all, so what is the meaning of this!”

“That’s…”

Ainz’s face twisted as he looked down on Lupusregina, who was unable to answer him. This was an unforgivable sin for a worker; no, for anyone. These rules were obvious for anyone who did business, or rather, for anyone who worked in society at all: “Report, Communicate, Discuss”. Report what you learned. Communicate clearly with others. Discuss issues as they came up. They were considered the lifeblood of a company's operations, and they were very important.

If she can't even do that, I don't think I can forgive her from the perspective of a leader… no…

As he looked on the terrified Lupusregina, Ainz could not help but think that he was at least partially to blame. These mistakes would only result if a superior was unreliable and could not properly direct his subordinates.

A failure in the group's communications is my fault. I couldn't take proper control of this… maybe I should step back and let Demiurge or Albedo handle this sort of thing.

"...Lupusregina, are you aware of Carne Village's value to Nazarick?"

"Hah? No… yes. Er, I heard Ainz-sama say that village is very valuable…"

"No, no, I mean, what do you, personally, feel is valuable about the village?"

"W-well, there's a lot of toys there, and…"

"Ah, that's how it is. Well then… I'm sorry. It was my mistake. I did not realize you thought like that…”

Ainz laughed tiredly. He realized it was his fault after all.

“I take back what I said about you being a disappointment. I went too far. Please forgive me.”

“W-what are you saying? It was my foolish mistake!”

“Since it’s like that, just be more careful next time. Now then, I’ll explain again, so pay close attention. That village is very valuable to us. Especially that boy, Nfirea, and his grandmother Lizzie. They are of great importance to Nazarick.”

“Eeh? Is-is that so?”

“Indeed. I have handed the task of creating new potions to those two.”

“Ah, that-that’s right! I have something to show Ainz-sama!”

Lupusregina practically shouted that last part, her face pale. She took out a vial of purple potion and Narberal, who was closest to her, took it and handed it to Ainz.

“This is…”

Ainz looked at the potion through the light.

“Y-yes! This is Nfirea’s new healing potion!”

Ainz’s anger flared again, and he tried his best to quash it.

“If he managed to make this, then that family’s importance has risen again.”

Ainz laughed quietly as he saw Lupusregina’s clueless face.

This purple potion Nfirea made had been concocted using various items provided by Nazarick. The most important thing was that without possessing Yggdrasil’s potion creation skills, they had managed to use ingredients from Yggdrasil to create something other than this world’s “blue” potion or Yggdrasil’s “red” potion.

“To start, the healing potions of this world are blue. But the healing potions I know of are red. Curious, don’t you think?” Ainz rambled.

The knowledge and powers of YGGDRASIL were applicable to this world. From the angels he had first encountered, to the apparent existence of World-Class Items, there was a very high chance that players had been here in the past. In that case, why was it that the potions were not red like in YGGDRASIL? There were three possibilities. First, the downfall of a country might have resulted in the loss of those potion-making techniques. These techniques should have been quite widespread, and nothing short of an entire country’s destruction would be able to wipe them out.

The second reason might have been that Nfirea simply did not know these techniques since they had not spread to the nearby countries. Perhaps distant countries might be using red potions. After all, in Japan, the same soup looked completely different when prepared on different sides of the country. The third reason was optimization: making in-game potions would require in-game materials. Maybe those materials were difficult to find here, or they weren’t available at all, and that’s why only blue potions could be made with this world’s materials.

“That is to say, except for the second possibility, this potion that Nfirea made—”

Ainz swirled the purple potion in its vial.

“This might be a once-in-a-century technological revolution, for all I know. Well, if it’s the third possibility, this might turn out to be a failed product after all. His hard work in the future will give me the answer.”

Ainz hoped that Nfirea would be able to make in-game potions without consuming in-game materials. Who knew, perhaps he might end up making a third, completely different potion.

“Then, wouldn’t it be more effective to let more people research the subject?”

Narberal’s question made Ainz frown.

“That is a foolish question. Narberal. Indeed, the work would proceed more quickly, but it would be very dangerous. Knowledge is power, and freely distributing it is a foolish action.”

Yggdrasil was also like that, so Ainz could confidently say that.

“For example, there is a possibility that his potion could be refined to the point where it could kill me with a single attack. Then, it would be safer to monopolize this knowledge than to spread it… It’s better for vassals to be a little ignorant, but technological advancements must be scrutinized. This is the same for Nfirea and his potions. Though I would like to lock him up in Nazarick and make him focus solely on research and development...”

This would both prevent the spread of the technique and the usage of the potion.

“Then, then why have you not done so?”

Narberal’s eyes seemed to say, “Please order me to do so,” and so Ainz replied immediately,

“Rather than imprison him and force him to work, I will build his trust in us as a long-term scheme that will bring better benefits to Nazarick.

Demiurge analyzed the situation and concluded that it was better to shackle him to us with a debt of obligation— Hm? What's wrong, Lupusregina?"

"There's one thing I don't understand. Could you explain it to a fool like me? Why did Ainz-sama give the potion to someone like Brita?"

Ainz had no idea who Brita was, going by her name alone. While trying to maintain an all-knowing sage-like facade —which was to say, a carefully blank expression— he struggled frantically to think of a solution.

Could it be that potion?

Ainz recalled the first night he spent in E-Rantel. As the memories came to mind, Ainz was grateful that his body could no longer sweat.

—*What should I do? What should I say?*

But he could not keep silent forever.

Demiurge! Albedo! Why aren't you here! No, Demiurge is currently abroad performing his tasks, and Albedo is in confinement! It's too late to call her over!

"—Is that so, you really don't understand?"

"Yes. I apologize for my lack of knowledge. Please enlighten me."

Just don’t ask! Ainz wanted to shout. However, he had no other options, so all he could do was roll the dice and hope for the best. As the thought came to mind, courage filled him.

“Fufu… hahahaha. Indeed, it was a dangerous move that you, Lupusregina, have the right to be curious about. It could have resulted in a development that we would not be able to control. However, there was a motive for taking such risks.”

“A-a motive? Wasn’t it just meant to compensate her for the loss of her potion?”

Narberal’s interruption made Ainz swallow the words he was about to say. His brain spun into high gear, and he struggled to recall that encounter in E-Rantel.

That’s right! At that time, I just did it so I wouldn’t be seen as a cheapskate! Damn!

Ainz maintained his calm demeanour. Caught with his pants down, he had to tell a lie to cover up another lie. He struggled to muster up the vestiges of his rapidly-vanishing courage.

“...Is that all you thought I was doing, Narberal?”

“I am very sorry!”

“...No, this isn’t something you should apologize for. At the time, I wasn’t confident my plan would work out, so I chose a simpler explanation.”

“Then… what was your real aim?”

In the face of Narberal’s questions, Ainz’s jaw hung open for a moment at a loss for words. But in that moment, inspiration struck. With that as the basis for his confidence, Ainz prepared to speak.

“...It was Nfirea…”

As Ainz slowly opened his mouth, he took in the subordinates around him. If Demiurge or Albedo were present, they would probably interrupt and say, “Ah, so that’s how it is. As expected of Ainz-sama.”

Narberal, on the other hand, could only furiously furrow her brows.

“...Nfirea…?”

Ainz cupped his chin with a silent “Umu”. Fear began creeping over the faces of Narberal and the others, because they thought Ainz’s pose meant, “do you *still* not understand, even after I’ve said this much?” In truth, Ainz had made that gesture unconsciously, not knowing what to do with his hands.

In a short period of time, Ainz had been subjected to extreme tension and mental stress. Between these two clashing forces, an epiphany came upon Ainz. He did not know how it would sound until he said it, but all he could do was head forward while stumbling through the darkness.

“...Mm. I intended to get the attention of the pharmacist known as Nfirea, is that enough of an answer? How shall I say this… what would you do if you got your hands on a potion that was completely different from any other potion that you had ever encountered?”

“...Discuss it with someone?”

“Exactly! Lupusregina, it is exactly as you said. As I predicted, Brita brought the potion to the pharmacist she trusted the most. That was how I came into contact with Nfirea.”

Nfirea had apparently said something similar when they met at Carne Village.

“Ah! So that’s how it is! That was your objective all along!”

“You seem to get it. That was the bait for my hook to catch a master alchemist. Although there was a chance it could have ended up in a strange place and caused problems, it was still worth a try.”

Ainz could sense the girls understood the point he was trying to make.

I managed to connect all the points together...

Just as Ainz was about to sigh in relief, a sudden, unexpected question came.

“Then… I understand I’m being very rude, but could I ask one more question...”

No, you may not. Stop. Please. I’m begging you. Don’t ask me any more questions.

Ainz was crying inside, but his face remained impassive.

“What’s the matter, Lupusregina? If you have any doubts, feel free to clarify them with me.”

“Yes.”

Lupusregina swallowed, and with a serious expression on her face, she asked,

“Does Ainz-sama always think this far ahead when making plans?”

How could that be? Most of the time, he made things up on the spot. Of course, he planned for the future, but more often than not, the results were completely different from what he intended. Of course, he could not say any of that.

Ainz laughed quietly. It was a practiced laugh.

“Of course. I am the ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, Ainz Ooal Gown, am I not?”

Quiet exclamations of “Ohhhh!” rose up from all around him, and Lupusregina’s eyes went wide.

“What’s wrong, Lupusregina?”

“A wise king…”

Lupusregina’s gasped words made Aura frown, and she took a step forward. However, Ainz stopped her.

“Pay it no heed. Is that all you have to ask?”

“Then, er, then, another. Wouldn’t it be better if we let the monsters attack the village, and then Ainz-sama would swoop in to save them, wouldn’t that be better? I mean, wouldn’t Nfirea and his grandmother feel extra grateful to Ainz-sama for plucking them out of danger? That would make them more useful… right?”

“Well, that is a good plan, and worth considering, However, Nfirea might end up hating the monsters too much and be no longer willing to help us… perhaps it would be more effective if we saved Enri Emmot as well.”

Carne Village was a village that had been saved by the magic caster Ainz Ooal Gown. As long as it had value, that method would be of questionable use.

“By the way, the most important people in that village are —in descending order— Nfirea, his crush Enri Emmot and finally his grandmother Lizzie. You must protect these three people no matter the cost. Everyone else is expendable. If need be, sacrifice your life to protect Nfirea. Is that all, Lupusregina?””

“Yes! Thank you very much!”

“Now then, Lupusregina, I will forgive you for this lapse. Now that you know my objectives, do not expect to get off so lightly the next time you make this mistake. Do you understand?”

“Of course!”

“Very good. Then go. Show me results that will change my opinion of you.”

Lupusregina bowed and exited the room, followed closely by Narberal, who seemed more like a policeman escorting a criminal. After the two of them vanished out the door, Ainz turned to the Guardian beside him.

“Aura, the Giant of the East and the Serpent of the West, do you know —”

Suddenly, a loud shout came from outside the room.

“Ainz-sama is amazing! I can’t believe he thought so far ahead, and in such detail! He must be some kind of monster!”

The voice that came through the thick door was not very loud, but it was enough to interrupt their conversation. Given that they could hear her words so clearly, how loudly was she yelling in the corridor, just outside?

“...Should we tell her how thin the doors are?”

“I think she’s just too excited, maybe a good punch will cool her down —”

There was a smashing sound from outside the door, and then the sound of something heavy being dragged slowly away.

“Aura, I don’t think you need to go any more. Back to the previous topic; let me know what you’ve found.”

“Yes. Er, I’m very sorry, but I haven’t heard anything about the Giant of the East and the Serpent of the West. After we fought that tree monster called Zy’tl Q’ae, I did a quick sweep of the forest, aside from the underground caverns, which I didn’t investigate. I didn’t find any strong enemies…”

“Well, if they’re only as strong as Hamsuke, I understand why you wouldn’t have paid any attention to them.”

Even a gardener would not know how many ants were crawling in his domain. If they occasionally missed a strong enemy, that could only be chalked up as part of the job.

“I am truly sorry. Then, Ainz-sama, will we be doing house-cleaning?”

“That sounds like a good idea. We’ll get rid of those pesky flies and put the forest under Nazarick’s complete control.”

“Got it! Then, I’ll send some of my pets along—”

“Mm, about that, it seems a little boring that way. I’d like to see what sort of creatures this Giant of the East and Serpent of the West are, who can rival Hamsuke.”

“Then, shall I bring them here?”

“No, I think I shall go visit them in person. Thanks to Hamsuke, I’ve found another way of appreciating the value of antiques as well.”

Ainz laughed at the puzzled expression on Aura’s face.

“Well, of course that’s not all. I also intend to make sure Lupusregina is doing her job…”

Nazarick Time 19:16

Late at night in the forest, Fenrir ran smoothly without making any noise. There were places where branches protruded or which were covered by vines, but it didn’t matter for the two riding on it. Fenrir was like a spirit without physical form, not harming even a blade of grass with its strides. One of Fenrir’s skills was hastened movement over land.

“Further ahead would be the suspected residence of the Giant of the East as reported by my subordinate.”

In the dense vegetation which blocked out the lights from the stars and moon, Aura didn’t sound nervous at all. Unlike the vision of normal humans, she and Ainz could see as if it was noon.

“Is that so. The Giant of the East and the Serpent of the West, it would be too greedy to hope that both of them would be here. I will leave the absent Serpent of the West to you, Aura.”

“Okay! I will work hard! What should we do about the fools who oppose Ainz-sama?”

“Let’s have a chat with them first.”

Aura turned back to look at Ainz with a baffled face.

“Hmm? Aren’t you going to turn them into your subordinates?”

“The Giant of the East and the Serpent of the West are unknown monsters. It would be better to start with a chat. They are precious monsters that didn’t exist in the game after all.”

“Ainz-sama is so kind.”

Aura wasn’t being sarcastic.

“Re-really? I am only kind to those who I can make use of— and the residents of Nazarick… If they are equals with Hamsuke, they should have some use, that’s how I see it. Rare items are worth collecting.”

“I heard what you mentioned just now, but is Hamsuke really that valuable?”

“Of course. As a guinea pig.”

Hamsuke was undergoing intense training as a warrior under the tutelage of Zaryusu. By the way, an undead created by Ainz was also one of those disciples. Would the two of them —one a beast and one a corpse— be able to master warrior skills? If the undead could be taught to use martial arts, the combat potential of Nazarick would increase tremendously. Ainz didn’t think it was possible, but he would never know unless he did the experiment.

“It is important enough to warrant the blacksmith making a suit of armour for it?”

“You are well informed. This is one of the reasons. We will be sending Hamsuke out to battle in the future, so improving defence is necessary.”

If she learned martial arts, Hamsuke would be able to wear full plate armour. However, evasion and mobility would be lowered if the armour was equipped right now... In order to counter this—

If Hamsuke learns martial arts, that would allow for smooth movements, even while wearing full plate armour. If we were in the game— No, even right now, I am unable to wear metal armour. Considering that, we are a long way from success… If there was another Hamsuke, we could test another method…

Overall, the exact differences between this new world and the game rules were still a mystery. Demiurge would be able to find out by experimenting thoroughly, but Ainz didn’t feel like doing so for some reason.

Magic, something that runs contrary to the laws of physics, exists in this world. The concept that nothing is true, everything is permitted might have been forced onto me…

“Is something the matter, Ainz-sama?”

“Hmm? No, nothing. Why do you ask?”

“Because you looked as if you were thinking about something, I was just wanted to know if that was the case.”

“Ahhh, that so? Just pondering trivial matters, nothing important.”

“I see.”

Aura faced the front once again in relief, her silky blonde hair swaying with the movement. Ainz shifted his gaze down that slender back— at his hand that was wrapped around that petite waist.

What a slim waist. That’s how kids are...

Ainz didn’t have any children himself and was curious. He tapped her waist and back lightly, as if to confirm something. Ainz did so gently since they were on Fenrir, but Aura still jumped and turned around with a jerk.

“Uwah! What-what is it Ainz-sama?!”

Her entire face was red, something even someone without night vision would be able to tell.

“Ahh, nothing, I just felt that your waist was really slim. Are you eating well? You might have equipment that sustains you without having to eat, but you can still eat if you wish to, right?”

“Ye-yes. Eating won’t grant any buffs, but I am still eating properly.”

In the game, humans and demi-humans, who had limited lifespan, would grow and age normally. In contrast, heteromorphic races with unlimited lifespan would stop growing after a certain stage. If this world was like this, Aura and Mare would have room to grow further. Since they were still growing, Ainz hoped they could have a diet as nutritious as possible. With his comrades gone, Ainz was responsible for the growth of these children.

“Eat your meals properly, alright?”

“Yes! I’ll eat until Shalltear despairs!”

Why did she mention Shalltear? Ainz decided not to worry about it too much.

“...Equipment that allow subsistence without food might not be good for growth, switch it out if the situation allows it. In the future, both of you may meet someone you love…”

Aura and Mare were cute kids, and when they grew up, they would become a beautiful young lady and a handsome young man, respectively. Ainz imagined the two of them being surrounded by members of the opposite sex professing their love for them… Although he had never experienced this before, Ainz felt embarrassed just imagining it. And, probably from the influence of the conversation earlier, a large number of Hamsukes appeared in his mind.

“—Huh?”

Aura and Mare being surrounded by a large number of Hamsukes was cute, but it was different from what he had in mind.

A hamster is a type of rat, and should be able to reproduce fast. It’s only right to spay or neuter your pets… I did think about breeding a certain number of them… Are there any males of the same breed?

“Huh!? That’s way too early, Ainz-sama. I’m just seventy-odd years old.”

“True, true. You’re still a kid, huh. By the way, who do you like in Nazarick, Aura? What is your type?”

Ainz, who didn’t have any experience with love, would normally feel jealous when he saw couples display their affection in public, but he would be able to offer his blessings if it concerned these NPCs.

"I like Ainz-sama the most."

"Haha, that makes me glad."

The pleasantries of Aura the child made Ainz happy. For Ainz, who loved the NPCs like his own children, he would naturally smile when he hear them say they liked him.

"So, who does Ainz-sama like the most? Albedo or Shalltear?"

"Haha. Well, I like Aura a lot."

"—Eh?"

Ainz patted Aura's head from behind, ruffling her hair through his fingers.

"—Ehhh!?"

Should I think about Sex Ed for the children? If there is a school for dark elves, sending Aura and Mare there will allow them to grow right? What would Bukubukuchagama do if she was here? Speaking of schools… Campus love comedy… That's what Peroroncino-san screamed at Slathan-san to make Nazarick Academy together. Where did that data go?

"—Ehhhhhhhhhh!!"

“What is it Aura, that was loud.”

“Ah! I-I am sorry. Doing that so near the Giant of the East’s territory…”

“It’s fine, no need to apologize. It is a matter for the future anyway—”

“F-future?”

“Yes, that’s right. What is it? You seem worried… Something wrong?”

“No no, it’s nothing. Yes. Eh, so it will happen in the future?”

“Ahh, yes. If there is a nation of dark elves, it will be good to visit it. You should come along then.”

“Huh?... Ah, okay! That kind of future! Right. Yes! Please let me go along with you. Well then— we are almost there, Ainz-sama.”

An unnatural light could be seen in the night air through the opening in the forest ahead.

“Alright. Well then Aura, sorry, but can you post the monsters you brought along around the perimeter? I need to make some preparations.”

Ainz activated one of his unique skills, summon high tier undead. What appeared was a horseman with an ominous aura who was riding on a pale horse. Ainz repeated the summon several times.

“Alright, four should be enough. Well then, Pale Riders, stand by in the air. Capture anyone who attempts to escape.”

The riders acknowledged wordlessly and rode into the air with a tug of the reigns. Their forms turned immaterial as the riders passed through the branches and flew into the sky.

“Okay, the nets have been set. All that is left is to appraise them.”

“Yes! Ah, don’t we need to test their durability?”

“We don’t need to spend that much time. I am not looking for a fight, just a chat with them.”

Ainz really meant it. He didn’t like battles. He was willing to resort to ruthless means as long as there was something to gain, but personally, he detested cruel behaviour. Ainz wouldn’t intentionally step on ants and a resolution through dialogue would be the best method.

Fenrir reached the opening in the forest. Although it was referred to as an opening, it was just a place with relatively fewer trees.

Just like how trees around a demonic tree would wither, trees wouldn’t grow in some places. There could be plenty of reasons for that, and the reason here was probably because a monster was in residence.

The trees felled by axes were scattered all over. It was a pitiful sight, as though someone had messed the place up in frustration after a hiccup in a major construction project.

“How amusing. Aura, they are probably mimicking your structure. The works of fools are so ugly. This is what happens when creatures living in caves want to build something.”

“That is so, Ainz-sama. This is their nest.”

There was a crack near the black, burnt ground.

“...Can’t they even decorate a little? Well, forget it, let’s leave knocking for next time.”

Ainz followed Aura as they moved into the cavern near the clearing. Glancing ahead, he could see that the slope at the entrance was slight and the space within was rather small. The ceiling was high, which allowed huge creatures to move freely.

… This reminds me of a dungeon exploration during my gaming days. When I found a cave in the mountains, I would get excited and wonder what was inside.

Back then, the one leading the way would be Tigris Euphrates, Ainz—or rather, Momonga would follow behind. Momonga would summon undead to support them. These undead would be sent ahead of the party to trigger traps, in what was called a “warrior’s disarm” or “summon disarm”.

How nostalgic…

Ainz who was reminiscing the past walked briskly, but his good mood only lasted several seconds. The stench coming from below made Ainz frown— even though he didn’t have brows. It wasn’t the pungent smell of gas, but that of decomposing animal fat.

Is this a trap to conceal the smell of gas with that of rot? Can the dumb beings living in caves make such an elaborate trap… This is probably a coincidence.

Ainz was an undead that did not need to breathe and had absolute resistance against such airborne attacks. Aura was protected by magic items that would block the effects of the stench if it was an attack. Hence, this place simply smelled bad.

“The Giant of the East does not seem to be a hygienic creature. It would be great if it is intelligent enough to converse with.”

“That is true. However, that will be difficult. Judging from the footprints, they are several barefooted creatures living in this cave. The prints are large, so they must be at least two meters tall.”

“I see… And that is one of them.”

They descended the slope in the next second, and Ainz saw the monsters that lay beyond.

“Ainz-sama, that is an ogre…”

Two of them were carrying something with a bloody scent into the cave . Ainz pointed at them with a wry smile. If this was a dungeon crawler, he would have killed the ogres in silence and proceeded to clear the floor quietly, but this time the objective was a bit different.

“...I didn’t come here to wipe them out, I need to chat with them in a friendly manner... Hey, you ogres there, sorry for interrupting your meal.”

The two ogres looked at Ainz in unison and roared. Echoes were loud in the caves, so Ainz wasn’t able to tell where the roar in response came from, but it probably came from the depths of the cave.

“What a loud doorbell, how tasteless... Aura, fall back.”

Watching the ogres become more agitated, Ainz sighed. He understood that they had no intention of conversing with him.

“Skeleton! Skeleton! Bad!”

The ogres came before Ainz with their murky words, swinging their clubs.

“Anyhow come—” The ogres raised their clubs high and swung down “in house—” as they attempted to send Ainz and Aura flying. However, their non-enchanted clubs would never be able harm them. “Say sorry—” The ogres struck again.

Ainz head was clobbered hard and his vision shook a little. It didn’t hurt, but it still made him mad. Anyway, Ainz would kill anyone invading Nazarick in a fit of rage. When he thought about it that way, it was only natural that they would attack him, so he took it without complaint.

An envoy of peace would lay down his arms and wait for the situation to unfold.

The ogres arriving afterward didn’t have clubs, and simply reached for Ainz and Aura with their bare hands. They probably wanted to grab him after seeing that clubs were useless. Ainz furrowed his brows for a moment, although that gesture couldn’t be seen since he was a skeleton. It was fine for them to grab him, but Ainz saw through the darkness that the hands of the ogre reaching for him were covered in blood.

“Filthy.”

Ainz immediately took a staff out of thin air and swung it. It wasn’t imbued with any special magic, only an enchantment that increased the blunt damage it dealt. The head of the ogre reaching for him exploded. The ogres were splashed by the splattered brains and blood, and stepped back after dropping their clubs.

“You, you no skeleton…”

“It is troubling to think of me as a skeleton. I am here to meet your boss, the Giant of the East. Can you get him to come here? Well, he will probably come anyway if I wait.”

Ainz waved to shoo them away, and the ogres sprinted into the depths of the cave.

“Ara ara, I showed them the difference between our abilities too soon.”

Ainz touched the place where he had been hit by the clubs as he made his way slowly down the slope. This seemed to be their dining area, with the remains of numerous corpses lying everywhere. Ainz and Aura continued walking while avoiding those places.

“I messed up, I accidentally used too much strength because it was annoying. I was planning to negotiate with them before the talks broke down and it turned into a massacre…”

“This can’t be helped! Those lowly ogres wanted to touch Ainz-sama after all!”

“I am happy to hear you say that. Punitto Moe-san also said ‘throwing a punch to get the other party’s attention’... Or was that Warrior Takemikazuchi?”

“It can’t be wrong if these are the words of the Supreme Beings!”

Those two had extremely different views, so who said it? Ainz tried to recall when a large number of monsters flooded out of the cave. All of them were much taller than humans.

“A bunch of trolls huh. I thought the part about giants was just a ruse, but there appears to be some truth in it.”

Trolls had long noses and ears, with an exceptionally ugly face. Their large bodies were deformed, and thus nauseating. They wore clothes that looked like the skin of tiger-like creatures, with the beast’s heads hanging on their shoulders. Well over two metres in height, they had strength far exceeding that of ogres. Only fire and acid could stop their powerful regeneration abilities. Altogether, there were six trolls and fourteen ogres.

Ainz paid the most attention to the troll at the head of the group. It had a superior physique as compared to the other trolls and its confidence could be seen clearly on its ugly face. With leather armour made from the hides of several animals and a great sword that was larger than the one Ainz used in the guise of Momon, it had also better equipment than the others. The sword seemed to be a magic item, with some form of liquid flowing back and forth in the groove right in the middle of the sword.

“About the same as Hamsuke?”

“Looks like it.”

So this troll was the Giant of the East. Ainz observed carefully, wondering what kind of troll it was. Trolls were monsters with many different subraces, with unique adaptations depending on the place where they were found. For example, there were volcano trolls that were resistant to fires, sea trolls that could swim nimbly and breathe in the ocean, mountain trolls with monstrous strength living in the mountains and the rare toll troll, which lived under arched bridges. They could increase the variants of their species almost at will.

And so, what was the specialty of the troll before Ainz? Trolls which adapted to caves were called cave trolls, but they were different from what he saw before him. A troll that he saw for the first time in this world— this ignited Ainz’ collector spirit.

The Giant of the East was a rare variant. It had survived countless battles and had adapted to battle, a troll specializing in battles. Ainz dubbed it a war troll, a rare specimen even among the many types of trolls. Its combat abilities were exceptional compared to other trolls its age. Its body might be smaller than those of mountain trolls, but its muscular body and fighting ability were far superior to them. Its weapon wasn’t something that could be wielded with just brute force, but a sword. It was knowledgeable enough to know that clubs were subpar weapons. It was a troll that had awakened as a warrior.

“So you are the Giant of the East?”

When the other party didn’t deny it, Ainz pointed slightly to the right of the troll.

“I would be really happy if you are the Serpent of the West. Are you?”

Normal beings would think that there was nothing in the direction Ainz was pointing, but Ainz could see as clear as day that a heteromorphic being was there.

“You probably think you can hide using invisibility, but I have seen through it. You can stop your futile actions now.”

After dispelling its invisibility, a monster appeared in that empty space. It was indeed a serpent. No, it only had the shape of a serpent. The upper body was that of a frail old man while the lower half was a snake. Such monsters existed in the game and Ainz stated its race immediately.

“A Naga. It might be mistaken for a snake, but isn’t that an exaggeration? No, a title like Virtuous King of the Forest exists too, so it makes sense.”

“To see through this one’s invisibility, could it be—”

“—Why are you here, skeleton!”

A loud voice reverberating within the cave drowned out the words of the Naga as the Giant of the East took a step forward. With someone worth speaking to in front of him, Ainz faced the creature head on.

“First, let me clarify, I am not a skeleton. Correct your misunderstanding.”

“If not a skeleton, what are you?! I permit you to state your name before the King of the East, Guu!”

“...Guu?”

Ainz couldn’t understand what he was saying momentarily. Since it spoke like a king or a tribal chief, that was probably its name.

“I see, Guu. Apologies for the late introduction, my name is Ainz Ooal Gown.”

The cave echoed with laughter.

“Fuhahaha! The name of a coward! Not a powerful name like mine, your name is ugly!”

Following these words, the giants laughed along in an annoying way.

“Cow—”

Aura who had taken a step forward was stopped by Ainz.

“It’s fine. Don’t get angry over something so trivial, stay cool. We are here to talk as ambassadors of friendship. For future reference, could you explain why you think I am a coward?”

“Ahh, mysterious undead, long names like that are proof of cowardice.”

The Naga standing by the side explained to Ainz, a sarcastic smile on his wizened face.

“The ideas of worthless people. What about you, do you think my name is cowardly too?”

“No such thing, this old one has a long name too. This old one is the Serpent of the West you spoke of — Ryraryus Spenia Ai Indarun. Oh, invader Ainz Ooal Gown. This old one thinks their brains are not matched with their bodies, but there are pros and cons to them ruling over this forest.”

“...You have just saved your life.”

The Naga was shocked by Ainz’s comment. He wanted to ask further, but the giants were still laughing.

“What are you weaklings doing here!? To get eaten!? Bones are crunchy and delicious too! I will start from the head!”

“I am the one building a fort in the middle of the forest with undead and golems. Don’t you know?”

The atmosphere changed as Guu and his lackeys emitted fierce hostility, while Ryaryus was on guard.

“I know! Annoyance! If not for the nagging of the snake, we would have killed you long ago! Save me much time, cowardly black shortie!”

“What a quick conclusion. However, I am here to negotiate with you.”

Ainz gestured at them to kneel.

“Swear fealty to me if you want to live.”

“You stupid! We won’t listen to cowards! Eat you here right now! And the brat behind!”

“Guu, he is the one behind that terrifying building, it is dangerous to insult him! And that is a dark elf behind him! They were the lords of this forest before that demon tree came. They are strong— he is not listening.”

Ainz couldn’t take it anymore and laughed heartily.

“Hahaha! Your bark is worse than a dog, meat bag. How about this: I, the one with the cowardly name, will have a one on one duel with you, who has a powerful name. You won’t be scared and run away right? If you do, lower your head onto the ground and I will rear you like a slave.”

“Interesting! Me enough to fight you! Tear you to pieces, and eat!”

“Very good. This is your choice. The negotiations have broken down. Aura, go a little further away. I want to play with it by myself.”

Ainz had just finished when the sword cleaved down towards him. Guu attacked with his three-meter long sword. Ainz didn’t move and took the blow directly.

“—Huh?”

“What is the matter? You think this is unbelievable?”

Ainz remained still as Guu’s face twisted from surprise. He swung horizontally this time. Like before, Ainz took the hit straight on.

“Muu!?”

After retreating a few steps, Guu looked at the sword in his hand, and then at Ainz. He then turned his back to his foe and walked to the other giants.

In the next moment, the sword struck his troll subordinate. The sword cleaved in through the shoulder and split the troll easily, spraying blood everywhere.

With a loud, stupid sound, the giant roared in pain.

Seeing the state his subordinate was in, Guu nodded his head in satisfaction, confirming that there was nothing wrong with the weapon.

“I see, this is the regenerative power of trolls. It is really surprising to see it in action.”

The open wound healed swiftly, just like watching a video in reverse. He did that because he knew about his fellow troll’s ability, but Guu had a sinister face, as if he was ready to inflict another wound onto his subordinate on the floor.

“Deciding the fate of the weak is the privilege of the strong. However, I am... very unhappy.”

Ainz stepped forward, no longer in the mood to play. Guu gripped his sword tightly with both hands, waiting for the slowly advancing Ainz.

“Guu! This fellow, Ainz Ooal Gown is too unnatural! We have to work together to defeat—”

“Shut up! Just watch from there, coward! —Guoohhh!”

The barrage of attacks grew stronger with each strike. This attack power, which exceeded that of a human by far, was the greatest among all the opponents Ainz had faced since coming to this world. However, since they couldn’t crush sturdy siege walls or make a crater in the ground, these attacks were barely better than scratching Ainz’ back. Ainz took the attacks straight on.

“Oh look, my clothes are getting wrinkled, can you stop already?”

Ainz looked away with a bored expression and tidied his messy robes. He then looked up at Guu as if he just remembered something.

“Ah, you done yet?”

“Why you, rawrrr!”

Guu judged that the sword was not effective and attacked with his bare hands instead. The large fist was like a hammer that would crush normal humans or send them flying. Ainz took the attack that was fatal to humans head-on, and casually dusted off the place he had been hit , as if someone had dirtied him with his touch. Guu halted his attack, his ugly face turning more ugly, staring at the unsurprised Ainz.

“So the attack of one who has a brave name and great confidence ends here?”

“Your defence is pretty good— Hyaaa!”

Ainz, who had closed the distance between them, waved the staff in his hand, and half of Guu’s foot was blown off. Unable to stand, the giant fell onto the ground.

“Being timid doesn’t mean being weak, you can understand that even though your brain is the size of an acorn, right?”

The giants and ogres watching the duel witnessed the pathetic sight of their leader and gasped. Ainz sighed weakly, realizing that monsters that could only understand the situation this late were useless. However, it would be different if they were capable of seeing the right moment to escape.

“Aura, he is the only one who is not allowed to flee, catch him.”

Ainz was brief, but Aura understood immediately and took action. An instant later, Aura had reached the Naga who was trying to use

‘Invisibility’ in order to silently get away.

“Ainz-sama, I caught him, what should I do with him?”

Ainz ignored Guu who was before him and used one hand to grab the head of the Naga who was still facing Aura. That attitude showed Guu and everyone else one single thing— Guu was no threat at all.

In the face of such intense humiliation, Guu ground his teeth furiously and loudly. However, Ainz wasn’t bothered at all.

“Why you!” The Naga kept squirming, entangling Aura. “I will strangle you just like that!”

A calm voice came from within the balled up Naga.

“Hey, I can’t see Ainz-sama’s handsome figure like this. I will rip out your throat if you are too noisy, alright? But I will be careful and not kill you.”

After feeling their difference in strength from that small fist, the Naga slowly let Aura slide from his coils.

“Aura, time is money, so don’t do unnecessary things. Go further away, to a distance where he won’t get killed even if he gets dragged in.”

“Roger!”

Aura easily pulled the Naga that was several times heavier than her.

After the leg and the muscles that had been cut off had regenerated, Guu finally stand up. Ainz shifted his eyes to it, observing that Guu’s physique was still the same.

“You are healed. Shall we continue?”

Ainz said calmly while resting the staff on his shoulder. He was clearly showing Guu that he didn’t plan to defend against him.

“You, you, what did you do, do to me? What did you do? Magic?”

Guu retreated with his sword in hand while Ainz drew near in pursuit. Ainz had a shorter stride than Guu, so the distance between them was larger than before.

“Hmph”, Ainz sneered through his nose.

“—Huh? How funny. I, who has the cowardly name is advancing, while you, who has the brave name is retreating? Why is that?”

Ainz asked in a flat tone, and an answer came from behind.

“Because Ainz-sama’s name is brave, and the weird name Guu is cowardly. Right, snake?”

“Yes, Yes! This is proof of the greatness of Ainz Ooal Gown-sama!”

After hearing the cute, girly voice and the pained voice on the verge of tears, Ainz nodded repeatedly.

“I see, I see. That make sense. Cowards have short names— Ainz Ooal Gown is the name of the brave and mighty.”

“—Why you!”

“Shut up, coward.”

Driven by terror and wrath, Guu attempted a cleaving attack. Ainz didn’t dodge or block, hitting back with his staff directly. Ainz did not allow the sword to parry the attack or Guu to dodge.
The staff blasted part of Guu’s body away.

“Guwaaargh!!”

Amidst the terrible screams, Guu’s minions who were watching the battle cowered in fear.

“As expected of trolls, you recovered thanks to your regeneration ability. But it still hurts right? That was the strongest hit I have thrown so far, you coward who wants to protect himself from my attack.”

Before Ainz was a head that was half the thickness from before. Normal creatures would have died instantly, but the giant’s head was slowly recovering.

Guu’s face recovered to its usual ugly form, with intense terror engraved onto it. A fear several times stronger than before was pressing down on him.

“You, what are you! Why is my attack not working?!”

Ainz lowered his head and spread his arms slowly.

“...Death. I am the one who will bring you death.”

“All, all of you! Kill that thing!”

“Well well, as expected of the one with a cowardly name, to break the rules of a one-on-one challenge… It suits your name. That’s why, I will forgive you.”

Ainz announced in a great mood.

Bound by their fear of the unknown monsters before them, Guu’s minions moved slowly. Even the most stupid person could sense Ainz’ power. Even if they hated it, the scene before them confirmed this fact. They were very hesitant in going against either Ainz or Guu, staring at them without moving.

“Hurry!”

Even so, they weren’t moving.

It was the same for Ainz. Right now, there was an intrinsic balance that was restraining everyone. If this balance collapsed, the giants would flee from the cave immediately.

It would be a hassle if they ran away... A hassle to hunt and kill them one at a time.

“You are right, playtime is over.”

Ainz activated an ability he hadn’t thought much of— but which was a powerful force in this world.

‘Despair Aura V’.

An aura radiated out with Ainz at the center. Like puppets with their strings cut, the trolls, ogres and Guu all fell to the ground. The monsters laid there without moving. It was obvious that the flames of their lives had been extinguished.

The fearful voice of an old man echoed in the silent cave.

“What, what did you do, my lord?”

The naga did its best to keep away from Ainz, twisting its body. Ainz looked back at it.

“I used a special skill. Trolls might have regenerative abilities, but that doesn’t mean they can resist instant death attacks… All of you don’t have much value, but you might still be useful. However, if you reject my rule, you will be disposed of.”

“This old one is happy to serve under your rule! The weak submitting to the strong is only natural. This old one will brave hell for you with no hesitation!”

Ainz stared at the Naga whose head was almost on the ground, and shrugged nonchalantly.

“...Well, anything is fine. The reason I came was for negotiation after all.”

“How, how frightening. My lord, you must think that it’s fine whatever happens to this old one. My lord must regard this old one who rules the western forest on the same level as rolling stones.”

“No, I am slightly more interested than that. You mentioned something about dark elves right? Tell me the details.”

“Of course… Certainly. This old one will tell everything it knows! But, erm…”

Ainz waved for it to continue, and the Naga said:

“Could you spare this old one’s life after that?”

“I promise you this. If you swear fealty to me and work hard, I will reward you for your efforts… Speaking of which, where are your subordinates? Are you like Hamsuke, no, the monster that ruled the southern forest, who controlled the west alone?”

“No, this old one has subordinates. I did not bring them along for the negotiation with Guu. If negotiations broke down, they would not be able to escape with invisibility.”

“I see, then next question. Are there any trolls working for you?”

“Just one.”

“That is splendid. Can it replace the Giant of the East? No, that would… be difficult. Alright, bring your minions to my— no, to the building this child is constructing. Aura, let him go.”

“Would it be fine?”

“It’s fine, he already swore fealty to me. If he betrays me, I will think of another way.”

Aura slowly removed her hand from the naga’s throat, which had bruises in the shape of a hand. It was still tense, but the naga relaxed a little. Ainz ignored him and walked towards Guu’s carcass.

“I will use this as a reference for zombie trolls.”

Using a special skill. Ainz could turn corpses into undead. They were either zombies or skeletons, but the stronger the physical body, the more powerful the zombie. One famous example would be zombie dragons.

Ainz picked up the sword, which was much taller than himself, from the ground. It was a magic item that could change its size according to one’s strength. It would fall out of his hand if he tried to wield the sword as a weapon he was unable to equip, but just holding it was fine.

“How about giving this to the village to make it stronger? That might be the best way to use this magic item. It is not valuable enough to bring it back to Nazarick.”

“Ainz Ooal Gown-sama!”

Ainz looked boredly at the Naga who was trying to say something.

“This, this one won’t do something like betraying you! The only ones who would do that would be fools like the ants on the ground.”

“I don’t think the look in my eyes told you so much… Is that your special ability? Even that observant Demiurge can’t read my true intentions.”

“This is not a special ability, I can only sense whether someone was interested.”

This might be the special ability of all Nagas, Ainz thought.

“Is that so… Well, I understand. Hurry and gather your minions. This is my first command.”

“Yes!”

Part 4

Nazarick Time: 21:07

Demiurge entered Ainz’ office elegantly. He bowed deeply to Ainz, who was seated before him, nodded at Mare and Cocytus, who were at Ainz’ side, and acknowledged the presence of the maid with a glance.

Ainz responded with a look and contacted Entoma with ‘Message’.

『It is time, Entoma. Give Lupusregina her orders, she has to protect those three with her life.』

“By your will. I will relay that to Lupusregina.”

Demiurge walked slowly to the center of the room, and his cool movements made Ainz envious.

How is he able to move so confidently, is it better to keep my back straight after all?

When Demiurge stopped, Ainz spoke to him:

“You came, Demiurge.”

“Yes! Thank you for your invitation. Is the ‘Message’ with Entoma proceeding well?”

“There are no problems, she reported back and conversed with me clearly. The test is a success.”

“That is wonderful news. I am very grateful to you for making time for me.”

“Don’t mention it, Demiurge. Accommodating the one who works the hardest for Nazarick is only natural. And you didn’t make me wait long… Well then, let’s hear your thoughts.”

Ainz handed the paper in his hand over to Demiurge. After Demiurge shifted his eyes from the top to the bottom of the page, Ainz raised his question:

“As you can see, the content is a menu for a meal, what do you think? It’s meant for either a human male or female, maybe even a child.”

“…My view is that humans will eat everything Ainz-sama offers without any complaints, but that is probably not the answer you are looking for... I don’t think children will like foie gras? Also… Perhaps adding something refreshing will be better?”

“I see, good thinking. Thank you.”

“I am too honoured… Ainz-sama, are you planning to host some guests in the Grand Tomb of Nazarick, the sacred realm of the

Supreme Beings?”

“That’s right, I want to entertain my guests.”

Receiving guests with hospitality, in order to establish warm relations, display wealth and power, or hint at offering benefits.

“Will that be fine?”

“It should be. Are there any problems?”

“No, absolutely not. Ainz-sama’s words are absolute.”

In the past, the Grand Tomb of Nazarick had almost never invited guests other than the guild members. Akemi-chan, younger sister of the guild member Yamaiko, did visit on several occasions. There was no rule forbidding the invitation of guests, just that it was seldom done.

That’s why my guild mates should be fine with it even if I invite Nfirea and the others. They aren’t intruders, but guests.

Ainz asked Demiurge, who seemed to be pondering something, and the two guardians who were already waiting inside the room:

“Guardians, are you ready to visit the bath?”

“My deep apologies, Mare and I thought about going earlier.”

“Is that so, then Cocytus— you are already holding it. Let’s meet before the bath house then. Increment, if anyone comes to my office, let them wait here.”

“Understood.”

Ainz got up and left the room after hearing the answer from the maid. Leaving the minions who wanted to follow behind, Ainz led the way to the bath house that was situated in floor 9 as well. Ainz thought it would be better to chat idly as they walked side by side, but Cocytus’s cautious nature didn’t allow him to do so. Maybe he noticed that Ainz was feeling a bit lonely, Cocytus closed the distance and asked:

“Ainz-sama. Did. The. Number. Of. Eight. Edge. Assassins. In. The. Room. Decrease? Were. They. Sent. Somewhere?”

It might still be related to work, but conversing casually with Cocytus made Ainz feel better. Still, he kept his elation a secret when he spoke.

“They are in the E-Rantel hotel. Narberal is staying there in case some visitors appear. The Eight Edge Assassins are conducting surveillance some distance away.”

“Isn’t. It. Dangerous. For. Narberal. To. Be. Alone?”

“It is, right now is a good chance for someone to attack.”

“I. See. She. Is. The. Bait. Right. Now?”

“That’s right. If the enemy that brainwashed Shalltear is watching us, they will definitely think this is a rare chance. They might not want to get near Momon who defeated the powerful vampire Shalltear—although the name I gave them is different. What if Momon isn’t around and only one magic caster is left behind…”

“Will. They. Take. The. Bait?”

“No idea, but if they do bite, I will be a master baiter.”

Ainz made the movement of pulling on a fishing rod with one hand.

“Will. We. Send. Everyone. Out. When. The. Time. Comes?”

“No, we won’t do that. We will scope out the true identity of the opponent first. If they are as powerful as us, or better than us, then acting recklessly would be unwise.”

It made sense logically, but was hard to accept emotionally. Cocytus muttered:

“I. Understand. That. This. Is. Necessary. But. I. Find. It. Hard. To. Accept. This. On. An. Emotional. Level.”

“We need to investigate slowly and endure until the moment we discover the weakness of the enemy. When everything is ready, we will tear them to pieces. The sin of brainwashing Shalltear and forcing me to kill her is very heavy.”

Even if the other party was a player, Ainz didn’t feel for them at all. The only ones Ainz was concerned for were his past companions and the NPCs here. If anyone came to find trouble, he would teach them the terrible pain they would need to suffer for their foolishness.

“Repaying good with good and evil with evil. This is the norm of the world.”

A cruel smile appeared on Ainz’ face. He was feeling the exhilaration of the possibility of conducting more experiments if he captured a player. The experiment he didn’t carry out because it was too scary—death, would be the first test he would run.

“An. Eye. For. An. Eye. And. A. Tooth. For. A. Tooth. Right?”

“That’s true, but did you know? That saying also means that one shouldn’t go too far in seeking revenge. However, I intend to exact payback far beyond what they did to us.”

That’s what Punitto Moe would say, Ainz uttered in his heart.

“Ohhhh! As. Expected. Of. Ainz-sama. Excelling. In. Both. Might. And. Intellect.”

Without needing to turn his head, Ainz could feel the respect directed at him from his back.

“Is. Ainz-sama. Planning. To. Spend. The. Entire. Day. Inside. Nazarick?”

“No, after the bath, I will go through the work on hand and then return to E-Rantel. There are plenty of matters requiring my attention there too. What about you?”

“I. Will. Return. To. The. Guard. Post. Inside. Nazarick. For. The. Time. Being. The. Exploration. Of. The. Area. Surrounding. The. Lake. And. Other. Matters. That. Will. Benefit. Nazarick. Have. Almost. Been. Completed.”

“After you come back, the ones outside would be Demiurge, who is in charge of many projects, Sebas and Solution, who are gathering intel in the Royal Capital, Aura, who is constructing the base in the forest, as well as me and Narberal.”

“It. Is. Hard. To. Accept. The. Supreme. Being. Doing. Work. That. Should. Be. Done. By. Us--”

“Haha, just let this matter rest, Cocytus.”

“Please. Don’t. Say. That. Ainz-sama. Is. The. Ruler. Of. This. Place. Your. Word. Is. Law. Please. Ignore. My. Foolish. Rambling. Also—”

The air about them changed, making Ainz said “Ara?” Cocytus seemed a little depressed, but it was hard to tell— Ainz looked at him over his shoulder.

“If. Demiurge. And. Myself. Were. Truly. Excellent. There. Would. Be. No. Need. For. Ainz-sama. To. Venture. Outside. Correct? In. The. End. We. Are. Still. Too. Incompetent—”

“That isn’t true. All of you were created with a specific purpose in mind. That is why it is important for everyone to perform their assigned duties. To be honest, it is fine if you all couldn’t do anything else beyond that. Demiurge who is knowledgeable and intelligent is just too good, that’s all.”

Seeing that Cocytus was reluctant to agree, Ainz continued:

“Well then, you just need to increase the things you can do bit by bit. You should have learned plenty after subjugating the lizardmen village under our rule. Ruling the village will become the food for your knowledge from now on. Advance step by step like this, and you will be at Demiurge’s level one day.”

“Can. I. Really. Do. So?”

“I think it is possible.”

Ainz answered in a roundabout way.

“Demiurge is matchless in terms of intellect, to become a man who can rival him will be a tough road. However, I think that your efforts would not be in vain.”

The two of them continued walking in silence before Cocytus squeezed out his words out softly:

“My. Deepest. Gratitude. Ainz-sama.”

“I didn’t say anything that is worthy of your gratitude. Alright, Cocytus, we are almost at the bath. Let’s ease the atmosphere before Demiurge or Mare returns.”

“Yes!”

♦♦♦

‘Spa Resort Nazarick’ was a wonderful place located on the 9th Floor of Nazarick. It had a total of nine types of baths and seventeen baths for the two genders. The most famous bath was the Cherenkov bath with its blue rays that were so bright it hurt the eyes, a bath that exerted an air of elegance. Ainz, who arrived at the bath with Cocytus opened his eyes wide because he met an unexpected person.

“Ainz-sama!”

Hearts seemed to pop out at the end of her words as Albedo shrieked. No, not just her, Shalltear and a tired Aura was there too. Demiurge and Mare weren’t here, were they already waiting inside the changing room?

“Al-Albedo, why are you here?”

“Hmmm? I am here to bathe with everyone… Ainz-sama too?”

“Ah, yes... That’s right, what a coincidence, Albedo.”

“Really, what a coincidence! …I heard that it is better to exercise and sweat a little before entering the bath. How about Ainz-sama and I exercise and sweat together?”

Ainz felt a sudden chill.

“Well, table tennis sounds fine…”

“That’s not what I meant. I was talking about something naughty.”

With the agile movements expected of a level 100 warrior —too quick for Ainz to dodge— Albedo closed the gap with Ainz and tried to write something on his robes. However, her finger poked through the gaps of Ainz’ ribs.

“Ah.”

“Ah.”

Both of them spoke at the same time.

What a laughable sight, Ainz smiled wryly as he pulled his face away slightly in order to speak with Albedo.

“My finger pierced Ainz-sama’s important place…”

Albedo’s entire face blushed red, her eyes were wet and there was a fragrance about her. It was similar to what Ainz smelled on his bed.

“— Hey, I already asked this before, but isn’t this girl really weird?”

Aura asked her question while holding Shalltear back, while Ainz was stunned.

“…My sincere apologies, Ainz-sama. I couldn’t help myself. Eh, please think of this as the result of accumulating too much stress from working for Nazarick. Please.”

“That, that can’t be helped. Yes. Albedo, I am grateful for the hard work you put in everyday.”

Ainz who wanted to walk away in brisk steps was stopped by a hand grabbing his robes. There was no need to wonder who this hand belonged to.

“Albedo, what is the matter? Why are you so reluctant to let me leave?”

“When I hear these words… It ignites a fire in my heart. My abdomen is also squirming. That’s why— Ainz-sama...”

“Hey, wait, calm down Albedo! Co-Cocytus!”

“Leave. It. To. Me!”

The cold air that filled the room instantly lowered the room temperature in no time, making Albedo, who was going berserk, regain her wits.

“I. Will. Not. Forgive. Your. Rudeness. Towards. Ainz-sama. Even. If. You. Are. The. Overseer. Of. The. Guardians.”

Cocytus who put himself between Ainz and Albedo held a silvery white spear in his hand, it was obvious that he would attack if the situation warranted it.

“—Pardon my impudence, Ainz-sama. I lost myself back then.”

“I accept your apology, Albedo.”

Obeying his master’s will, Cocytus stepped aside, but held on to his spear.

“I know you are very stressed from your work, losing control is probably the way you relieve your frustration. Anyway, go take a bath and relieve your stress. Cocytus, good work.”

After Ainz finished, he parted the curtains of the men’s bath, but stopped because of the footsteps following behind him.

“…Why are you following me, Albedo? Just to be clear, this is the men’s bath, not the women’s bath.”

“I want to wash your back for you.”

“…Rejected. Furthermore, I am not alone and will be entering the bath with the other male Guardians. Are you fine with them seeing your naked body?”

She might say it is fine since she is a succubus, Ainz thought, but Albedo replied immediately.

“Well then, there are family baths in another place—”

“Family baths are not meant for that kind of thing!”

“But, Ainz-sama. I think it is too sly to only shower the men with your affection.”

“That’s right”, Shalltear whose mouth was being covered by Aura chipped in. The idea of going in together made Aura’s eyes sparkle, she preferred group activities. Cocytus seemed a bit troubled.

Bathing together is showing affection? …The previous incident too, isn’t Albedo a bit odd? Is she acting strange because of that incident?

“Albedo, let me say this first. I prefer women to men, and I am a pure heterosexual.” Ainz silenced Albedo who wanted to say something in return. “Maybe in the future, a relationship like that might develop. However, while the situation about this world isn’t clear, having such a relationship with one of you will be detrimental to the future of the organization.”

Uuuuu, Albedo furrowed her brows.

“And all of you are like the daughters of my friends— the relationship is too complicated.”

“I was wondering what was happening at the entrance, so it was you people giving trouble to Ainz-sama.”

“O-Onee-san… is dead.”

“I’m not dead”, the girl retorted weakly.

“I was waiting for the two of you.”

“Sorry for being late. However… Overseer-san, isn’t it about time for you to learn how to control your emotions?”

Demiurge’s narrow eyes widened slightly, showing his hostility openly. It was frightening when someone who was gentle became angry. True to these words, the atmosphere became tense. Influenced by the tension, Cocytus took a stance against Albedo too. Albedo was smiling as usual. No, her smile was deeper than usual.

“— Fools!”

Ainz roared angrily.

“Do not quarrel in front of me! Imbeciles!”

All the Guardians went down on one knee and trembled.

“We are very sorry, Ainz-sama!”

“…Enough, get up, everyone.” After seeing that everyone was up, Ainz spoke gently as if to soothe troubled children.

“Stop such barbaric disputes. That will disappoint me greatly, understood?”

After receiving acknowledgement from all those present, the wrath in Ainz’ heart vanished completely.

“Alright, let’s take a bath and change the mood. The men’s group will follow me. Aura, you are now the supervisor of the women’s group. Do not let those two behind you do anything stupid.”

“By your will!”

A fire burned brightly in Aura’s eyes. At first, Albedo and Shalltear thought it was a good chance to sneak into the men’s side, but their resolve was shaken after they saw how hyped up Aura was.

Ainz opened the curtains with the character ‘men’ on it, ignoring the ruckus behind him. He took off his clothes in the changing room. Usually, it was bothersome to remove his equipment, but he had already made preparations in advance and stripped in no time and walked forth briskly.

I’m naked right now, but how should I move…

His body was a skeleton without any meat or skin. It was unthinkable for Suzuki Satoru, but this was natural in this world. Ainz had wondered on multiple occasions how he should reconcile this difference in his actions.

“I will go ahead first.”

“Please, please wait for me!”

The naked Mare followed with brisk steps. He was normally dressed in a girl’s attire, but he looked like a boy right now. As he was still a child, there weren’t any bulging muscles on him. To think that such a soft body possessed such power, this was something unique to the nature of this world, just like Ainz.

Ainz thought that as he looked at Mare, and warned:

“Don’t run here. The floor is wet, it is dangerous.”

Guardians wouldn’t die even if they slipped and hit their head, but Mare looked just like a kid, so Ainz couldn’t help but worry.

“Y-Yes, I am very sorry.”

Don’t apologize so seriously, Ainz thought.

“Sorry for the wait.”

Demiurge and Cocytus followed shortly. Demiurge had a lean and well toned body. He probably followed a proper training regime, but part of the reason was due to the settings of Ulbert.

“Cocytus looks the same as he always does.”

“Well, he is always naked.”

“Could. You. Not. Phrase. It. In. Such. A. Lewd. Way?”

“Sorry. Cocytus’ exoskeleton is his armour. That is how he usually looks, so it can’t be helped.”

Exoskeletal armour was a type of body armaments, just like Shalltear’s nails and teeth. It could be strengthened with the increase of the user’s level and the use of crystal data. The good thing about a weaponized body was the convenience of not needing to replace the equipment, and it would be repaired when the user’s HP was restored. It wouldn’t drop upon death, and it provided its users with many benefits.

The drawbacks were that the hardness, toughness and other stats were comparatively lower than player equipment of a similar level. It was almost impossible for a level 100 weaponized body to reach the stats of divine level equipment. Perhaps that could be done with special skills that enhanced a weaponized body, but Ainz wasn’t sure of that.

For players, the cons outweighed the benefits, but the reverse was true for NPCs. The players could save the hassle of preparing another set of arms and armour.

“Thank. You. Very. Much.”

Cocytus lowered his head. Ainz didn’t really speak up for him, but—

It bothered him so much that he is thanking me— is he being bullied? Should I tell the others to take note of this?

This was probably how a teacher would feel if there was any bullying in class. *How would Yamaiko handle this*, Ainz thought as he said to the men’s group.

“Alright, let’s go.”

Ainz led them into the bath, which was made up of twelve zones in total. Starting with the largest, the jungle bath, there was also a traditional looking roman bath, a yuzu bath with yuzus floating on it, a carbonated bath, a jacuzzi, an electric bath with low current that electrified the body, a cold bath with charcoals floating on it, the Cherenkov pool —though nobody really knew what it was made of— and a mixed open air bath... although the scenery was artificial.

There was also a sauna, a bedrock bath and, finally, the lounge.

“Which one should we visit? Let’s hear your thoughts.”

“I. Think. The. Cold. Spring. Is. Great. If. Ainz-sama. Is. Agreeable.”

Ainz possessed cold resistance, so he wouldn’t be affected by extremely cold water, but it was definitely weird to recommend the cold spring right off the bat.

“Cocytus-san… We are here to bathe…”

Mare said diplomatically, and Cocytus finally realized he got things wrong. He corrected himself right away.

“Since we are here to bathe, we should go to a pool that will promote blood circulation… Wait, I have a question for you. Can you go into a hot pool? You wouldn’t become a boiled lobster, right?”

“No. Worries. My. Exoskeleton. Is. Resistant. To. Fire. Much. Tougher. Than. Your. Body.”

“Hmph,” Cocytus spoke pridefully.

“Er, erm, I think a normal pool will do…”

“I. Think. A. Cold. Spring. Is. The. Best… As. Comfortable. As. Submerging. In. Ice…”

“You are the only one who will say that, I think that’s an unpopular opinion…”

“Alright, it won’t be fun if we are not doing this together. Let’s go to all of them one by one. We will start with the normal forest pool. My comrades made them with a lot of effort.”

“I’m looking forward to it”, Ainz subordinates said as he led them towards the forest pool— with Cocytus who was feeling a bit lonesome — in tow.

The dense forest might be created artificially, but it looked so realistic that Ainz was expecting monsters to pop out from it any moment.

“This place is modelled after an area that existed in the past, the Amazon river. The creator was Bellriver-san, assisted by Blue Planet-san.”

With his back to the sighing Guardians, Ainz picked up a bath ladle and stool.

Why are all the ladles in this bath yellow? When I asked them, they said it was tradition… So all the bath ladles are yellow.

“This might sound obvious, but you have to clean your body before entering the pool. The way I wash up will dirty the surroundings, so don't come too near."

Having said that, Ainz poured a full ladle of warm water onto his body. An amazing amount of water bounced off without touching his body. Wetting his body in one shot was impossible. After repeating this several times and confirming his body had been rinsed, Ainz took out his brush.

After applying a lot of liquid soap, Ainz started brushing his body. There were plenty of gaps between his bones and the bubbles flew all over the place, as if a monkey was doing the brushing.

Huh, I should have brought my cute slime, bathing assistant Miyoshi-kun with me.

He shouldn't be showing others his goo-covered appearance, but cleaning himself with a brush after so long was a great hassle. While Ainz was working hard and brushing himself, Mare pulled a stool over with one hand. A little nervous with his cheeks red from the steam, Mare smiled:

"Ai-Ainz-sama! I, I will help you wash your back!"

"Hoh? Oh, I see. You want to help me wash up. It is tedious, so use this brush, using a towel will be tiring."

Ainz turned his back to Mare, who picked up the brush and started cleaning slowly.

“You are doing great.”

“Thank you very much!”

“You can’t do it wrong though”, Ainz responded to Mare’s thanks. He sneaked a peek at the other two.

“I will help you wash up.”

“Sorry to bother you.”

Ainz was all smiles— although he didn’t actually have an expression as he was a skeleton— and couldn’t suppress his grin.

— *Right now, this is the best place in Nazarick.*

Ainz’ smile deepened when he heard the child’s voice say: ”I need to wash here too”.

“Thank you, Mare. Now, let me help you wash up, you don’t need to hold back.”

Ainz turned the panicky boy around, and filled Mare’s towel with suds. Ainz washed carefully and made sure to apply enough force, relaxing more than when he was being washed.

“Does it hurt?”

“No, no problem!”

After cleaning up Mare’s unusually stiff back, Ainz returned the towel to him.

“You can do the front yourself right?”

“Of-of course!”

Ainz picked up the brush and scrubbed his ribs carefully, taking care not to splash water onto Mare who was cleaning besides him.

“Well then, I will make a move first.”

Demiurge, who was done, swayed his tail as he walked towards the pool. Next was Cocytus. Compared to Ainz, cleaning up was equally tedious for him, but his four nimble arms hastened the process greatly. Mare followed after, and finally, Ainz was done several minutes later.

The pool was large. Warm water flowed endlessly from an exquisite lion head and steam covered the entire place. Ainz watched his steps as he walked over, and saw two of the Guardians in the pool nearby, with Cocytus a bit further away.

“Ah... so comfortable.”

Ainz had the impression that children would swim in the pool, but Mare simply sat there maturely with a towel on his head. The way he talked like an adult even though he had the appearance of a kid surprised Ainz. The position of a Guardian was a tiring job.

“Indeed, I can feel the fatigue flowing out from my body.”

Demiurge took off his glasses and splashed his face as he breathed out, just like an old man.

“So. Hot…”

“Eh, you said you had resistance.”

“I. Didn’t. Expect. It. To. Be. So. Hot…”

“…Don’t release cold air because of that. And don’t come over here. A bath has to be hot.”

No wonder Cocytus was staying further away. The water around him was probably turning chilly.

“It. Feels. Nice. To. You. Because. You. Are. Resistant. To. Fire, Demiurge… Cold. Springs. Are. Great. As. Well. Right?”

“I’m not interested. Also, you can enjoy it without resistance anyway. Can’t you endure this bit of discomfort, Cocytus?”

“Are. You. Taunting. Me. Demiurge— Interesting.”

“Take it easy, bathing is a leisure. Go to the sauna if you want to compete in endurance. Don’t push yourself if it gets too hard.”

“Phew.”

Mare’s forehead was sweating as he exhaled hotly.

“Look, that’s how a bath should be. Don’t push yourself too hard Mare, get out of the pool if you can’t take it anymore alright?”

“No, no problem Ainz-sama! I will use magic if I really can’t take it!”

That would be weird too, Ainz thought without saying it out loud. He shift his gaze towards Demiurge.

“…Is entering the pool with your resistance on the correct way?”

“That is one way of doing it, Ainz-sama. It is similar to Ainz-sama who is an undead creature that can’t get wet.”

“…That’s true.”

He could feel his body warming up a little, but it wasn’t as comfortable compared to his time as a human.

The drawbacks of being undead…

While Ainz was missing the joy he had lost—

“Hmm?”

—He lifted his head above the steam and looked at the surroundings.

“May I ask what is the problem?”

“I think someone is calling my name.”

“Did. It. Come. From. Next. Door?”

Cocytus gestured at the wall behind him.

“That side is— I see, the women’s bath.”

“I see, but… Are the walls that thin?”

“Maybe. They. Are. Just. Too. Loud.”

Ainz focused on his hearing. He didn’t have any ulterior motives, just a bit curious about what the girls were chatting about. He didn’t stick his ears to the wall. That would be an action ill befitting the ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. Keeping some distance from the wall, he tried his best to eavesdrop on the sound from next door.

“Albedo is so bushy down there.”

The first thing he heard made Ainz frown.

“—Don’t put it so lewdly, Aura. Ah— Ainz-sama is probably beyond this wall. Are there any holes I can peek through?”

Ainz looked closely at the wall, wondering whether someone had built any strange mechanisms into it. There was a period of time when such devices were all the rage among the guild members, and some of them might have been installed here.

“—Shouldn’t it be the opposite? Boys should be the ones doing that.”

“—That is impossible. Ainz-sama just needs to command me to ‘show me the goods’, he doesn’t need to peek.”

“—Oh, Shalltear is actually making sense.”

“—How rude. Is that a toothbrush? Brushing your teeth in the pool… Could you not do that right now?”

“—It can’t be helped. It is hard for me to clean myself, so I have to do it in a large bath like this.”

Albedo’s voice seemed to be coming from a higher spot, and a loud brushing sound could be heard.

“—Hmm, that looks tedious. Alright, I will allow it.”

“—Thank you.”

“—Wahh, don’t look over here while grabbing your head. Disgusting. Shalltear, aren’t you going to brush your teeth?”

“—I can do that in my room, no need to do it here. Anyway, can we even get cavities?”

“—Even if you don’t have cavities, if you have bad breath while kissing, even a thousand year-old love will turn cold.”

The sound of the brush stopped and heavy footsteps could be heard.

“—Hmm, wait, are you going in like this? At least…”

After a loud splash, sound of water flowing down could be heard. Someone seemed to have boldly leaped into the pool.

“—Wah! Cough cough! If I were a vampire from the storybooks, I would have sunk and not gotten up!”

“—You are not a kid, don’t jump in!”

“—Fufufu. Ah…How relaxing. That’s why I came here.”

“—At least follow bathing etiquette… Oh?”

“—What? Hmm? The lion is moving?”

“—To not know the etiquette means you have no right to enter the bath! Exterminate!”

The sudden male voice made Ainz and the others looked at each other.

“Eh, that sounds like a man.”

“I. Never. Imagined. That. I. Would. Hear. This. In. Person. That. Is. The. Area. Guardian. Of. The. Bath. Right? But. Is. There. A. Man. In. The. Female. Bath?”

“No, I’ve heard that voice before… It’s Luci★fer-san.”

When he heard the ominous voice of that man, Ainz recalled the various troubles that Luci★fer had caused. To be honest, he didn’t really like that man.

“One of the Supreme Beings!?”

“—So hard! This is not a simple steel golem! Albedo!”

“—Die! You scrap metal golem!”

With the loud sound of impact, something crashed hard onto the wall. Even the wall on the men’s side was shaking.

“…Basically, prepare yourselves to charge into the women’s bath in full gear should the need arise.”

Ainz issued his command to the reluctant Guardians.

The fiasco should end if they disarmed the attack mode set up by his comrades, but they should be having an all-out battle next door. With their gear off, the women’s combat potential would drop drastically, so they might need to help them if the situation called for it.

“…I want to bathe in peace next time.”

Ainz said after shaking the water on his body off while walking towards the changing room. The Guardians nodded their head as one in response to the casual remark.

OVERLORD 〔8〕 The two leaders *Kugane Maruyama*

illustration by so-bin

おーばーろぉど

8 二人の指導者

丸山くがね

Afterword

I’ve been very busy recently. As a result my tummy and chin have become plump. I am the man who is evolving into Mr. Pig, Maruyama Kugane. To those who have bought this book or have it on hand, thank you very much!

For the most part, I’ve been busy because of the animation project, work and other things.

Right now the animation is going smoothly, with such heart warming exchanges as “How is Ainz going to smile?” “Just play it by feel!” “Save me, Director!”

In addition to the anime, the Overlord manga (drawn by Fukayama Fugin-san) has also begun serialization. By the time everyone has this book in their hands, chapter 2 should have come out. His work makes you feel that “Ainz is a really cool character!”

Then, although there’s not limited edition goodies for this book, but there’s a secret cover under the cover (i.e. the female Guardian bath time picture)

This piece of coloured insert art is on par with those of other light novels. It was made from So-bin-san’s reckless wish that went something like “no matter what I have to sacrifice, I want to draw something beautiful here!”, and I’m sure everyone -- myself included -- has been touched by that wish keenly as well. As expected, it’s much better than Kyouhukou for refreshing everyone’s hearts.

Although I have the feeling it won’t be possible from now on, I hope that readers who like this sort of thing will send their wishes to me on postcards.

Some people might ask, “Why is the background pink?’ The reason is because Editor-san said that pink was the most ideal colour for those people who wanted to join Ainz in the bath.

If any of you displays the book with the inner cover showing, I hereby bestow upon you the title of “hero”.

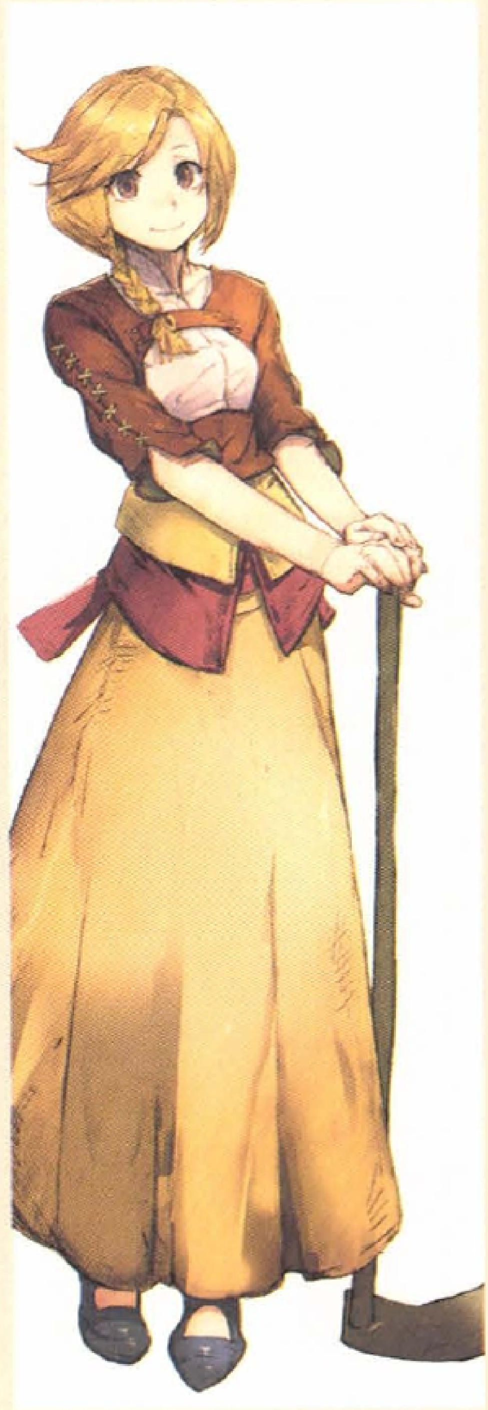
Then, after this will be the credits.

Many thanks to So-bin-san, who solved many problems even as the work grew ever greater.

Thanks to the designers at Chord Design Studio, the proofreader Osako-san, the editor F-ta san, as well as to everyone who helped me make Overlord. In addition, many thanks to honey, who spotted a lot of mistakes.

And finally, thank you to all the readers out there. I hope to speak to you again in the future.

December 2014 Maruyama Kugane



エンリ・エモット

Human
Race

enri emmot

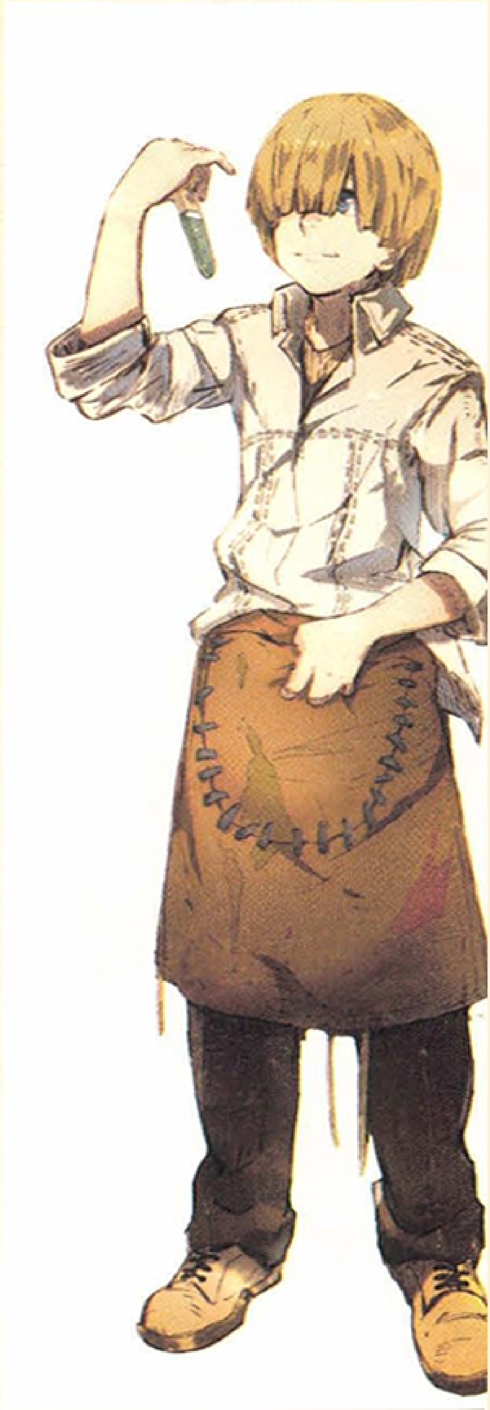
THE NEW CHIEFTAIN

Job	Chieftain	
Residence	Carne Village, Emmot Residence	
Job Level	Farmer	1 lv
	Sergeant	1 lv
	Commander	2 lv
	General	2 lv
Birthday	Middle Wind Month 10th day	
Hobby	Farming (There is not much else to do in the village)	

{ personal character }

A girl who recently became the chieftain of the Carne Tribe. Thanks to her healthy lifestyle of eating well and working hard, her upper arm muscle started becoming bigger and she developed abdominal muscles as well. Estimated to be amongst the top five strongest (amongst humans) in Carne Village. This is her levels at the end of Volume 8, she only had Farmer level one and Sergeant level one in the beginning.

Character 36



ンフィーレア・バレアレ

Human
Race

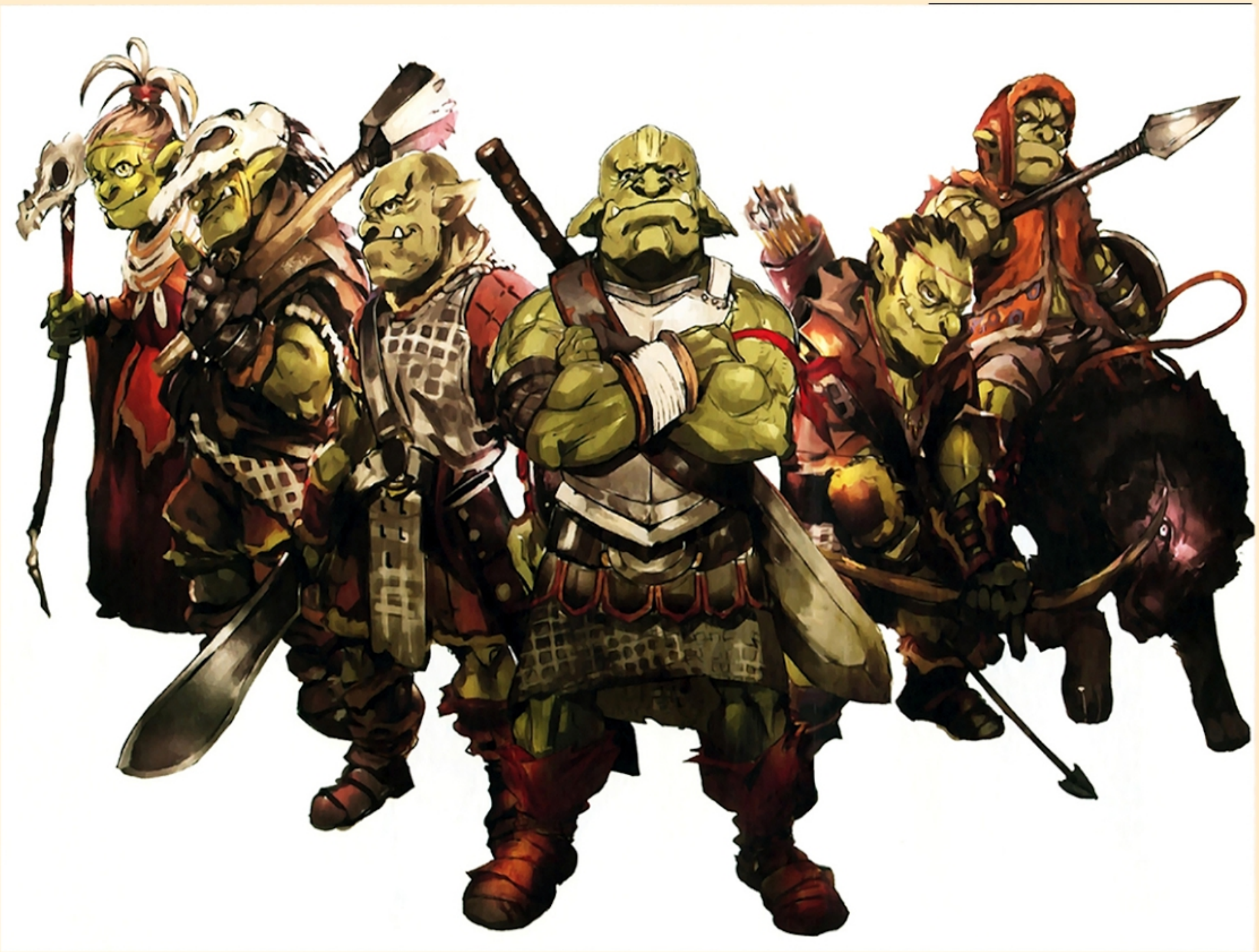
nfirea bareare

GENIUS ALCHEMICAL PHARMACIST

Job	Pharmacist	
Residence	Carne Village, Bareare Residence	
Job Level	Wizard	3 lv
	Alchemist (Genius)	4 lv
	Pharmacist (Genius)	4 lv
	Doctor	1 lv
Birthday	Middle Wind Month 18th day	
Hobby	Alchemical Experiments (Learning new things)	

{ personal character }

Possesses amazing talents, incomparably talented at abilities like alchemy and a pretty handsome boy. The living proof that some people have it all when they are born. Calls himself a pharmacist, but is actually closer to an alchemist. However, in this world, those two are not mutually exclusive, so he can be called one or the other.



ゴブリン軍団

Demi-Human
Race

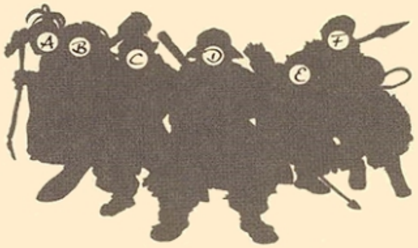
goblin troop

THE STRONG BODYGUARD CORP

Job	Enri's Bodyguard Corp	
Residence	Carne Village	
Individual Levels	Goblin Mage	10 lv
	Goblin Cleric	10 lv
	Goblin Soldier	8 lv
	Goblin Leader	12 lv
	Goblin Archer	10 lv
	Goblin Rider & Wolf	10 lv

{ character chart }

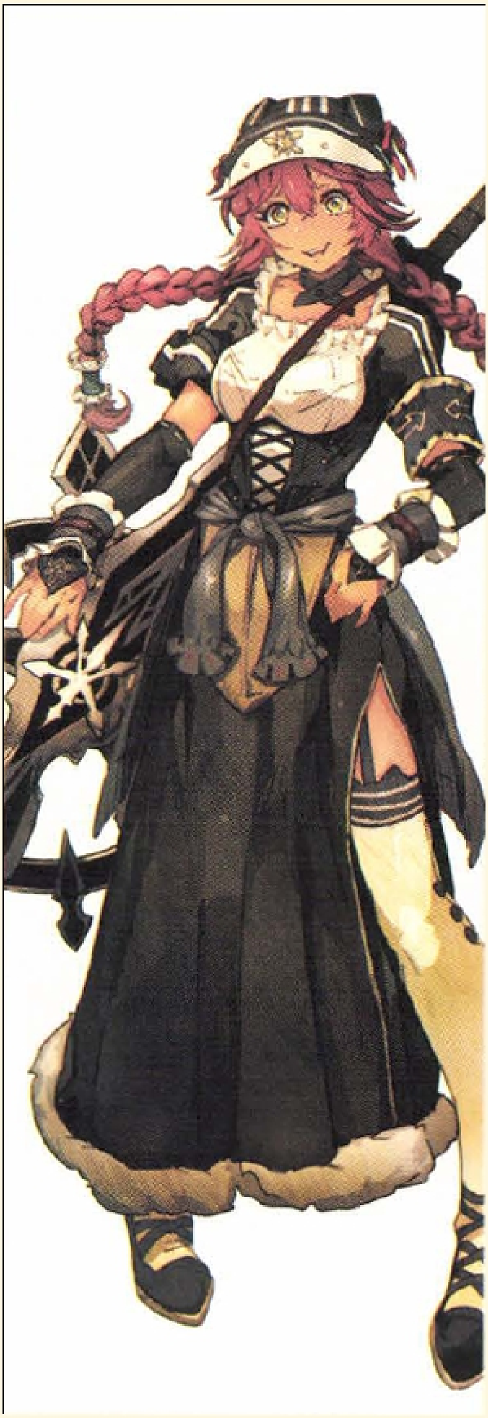
Name of Class	[No. in village]
ⒶGoblin mage	[1]
ⒷGoblin Cleric	[1]
ⒸGoblin Soldier	[12]
ⒹGoblin leader	[1]
ⒺGoblin Archer	[2]
ⒻGoblin Rider & Wolf	[2]



{ personal character }

The Goblin horde Enri summoned (total of 19). Absolutely loyal to the summoner. Their loyalty to Enri is similar to members of Nazarick's loyalty towards Ainz. However, unlike the Guardians' relationship with Ainz, their relationship is more cordial. They possess stronger physique than average goblins, so even their appearance is different from average goblins. Not all goblins possess their strength or physique.

Character 38



ルプスレギナ・ベータ

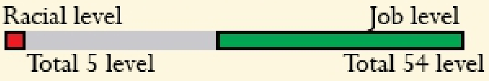
Heteromorphic Race

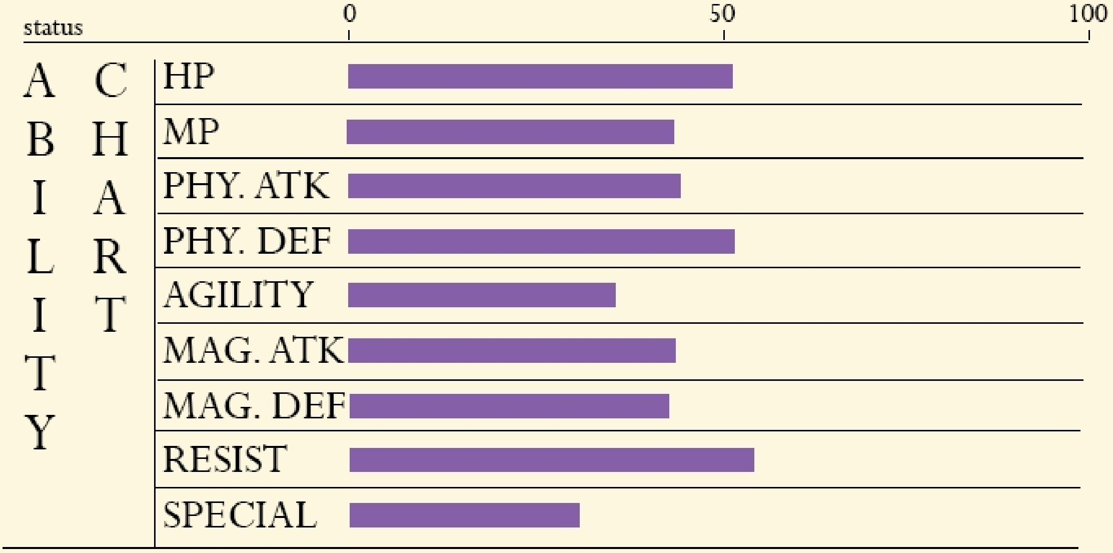
lupusregina・β

SADIST WHO WEARS A SMILING MASK

Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick Battle Maid		
Residence	One of the servant rooms in floor 9		
Alignment	Evil	Sense of Justice:	-200
Racial Level	Werewolf		5 lv
Job Level	Cleric		10 lv
	Battle Cleric		5 lv
	Warlord		4 lv
	Hierophant		5 lv
	Others		

[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 59 level





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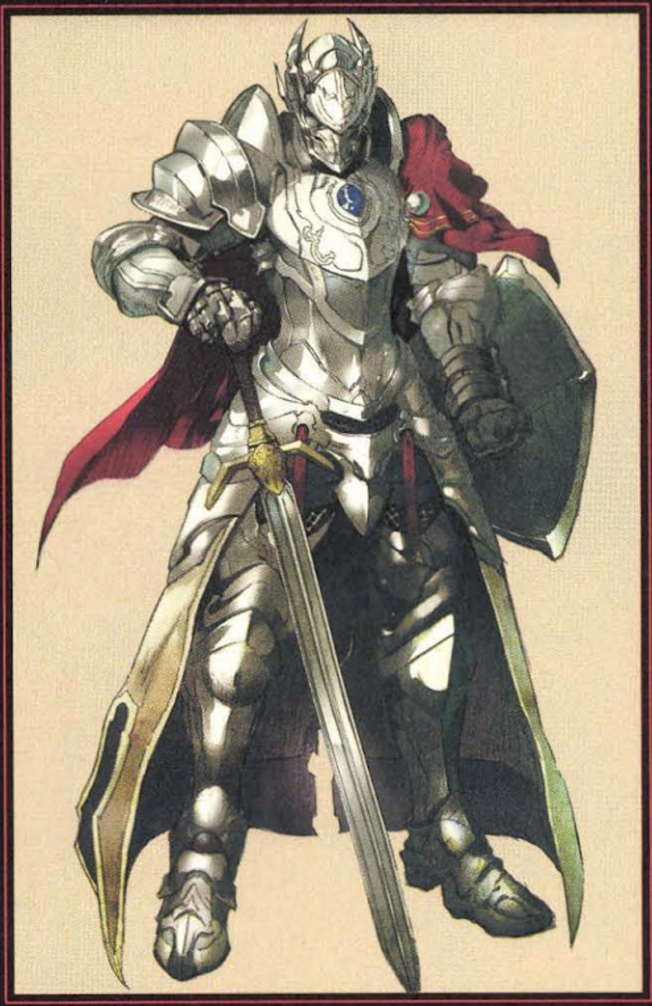
たっち・みー

Heteromorphic Race

touch me

Paladin of Pure Silver



personal character

A player who was famous for being one of the strongest in Yggdrasil. Originally he was in a similar position to guildmaster, but stepped down after a certain incident. Momonga succeeded him afterwards. In real life, he is a kind father who has a beautiful wife and a child. In other words, a winner in life.

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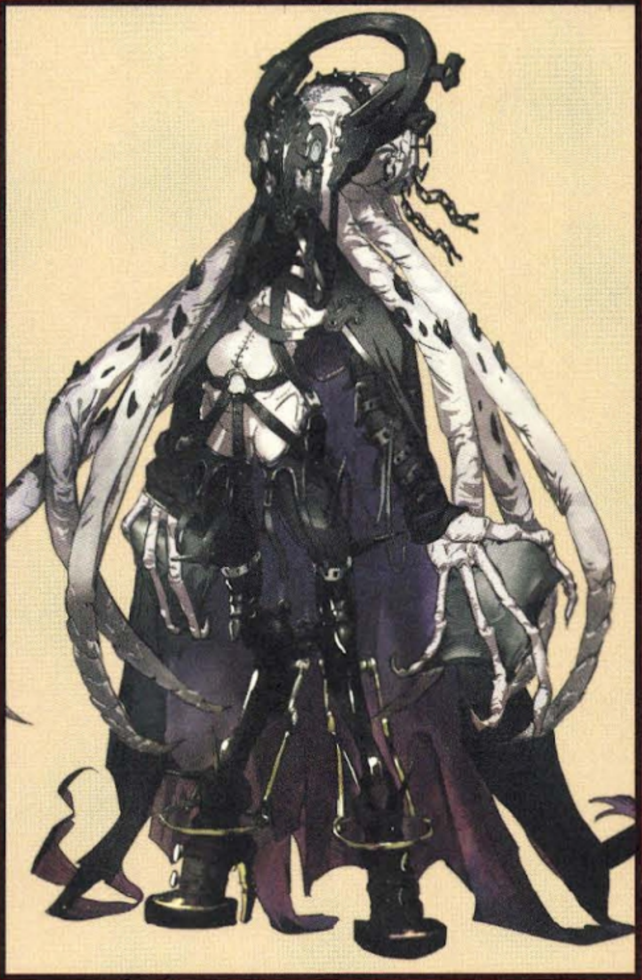
タブラ・スマラグディナ

Heteromorphic Race

tabula smaragdina

Great Alchemist



personal character

The man who has a thing for 'gap moe'. He loves horror movies, both classic and new ones and his knowledge of them always surprises everyone in the guild. His hobbies also includes TRPG and he showcases his personality as a man obsessed with settings and backgrounds on various occasions. Once lectured Momonga on mythologies and other misc. subjects.

Postscript by So-bin

THE OVERLORD MANGA HAS STARTED!! FUGIN-SAMA DREW THE HAPPY AND LOVING NAZARICK SO REALISTICALLY, IT'S AMAZING!

AINZ'S EXPRESSIONS OR THE DRAWINGS OF THE SETTINGS WAS ESPECIALLY FUN!!
I'M REALLY ANTICIPATING FOR CLEMENTINE.
ALSO, ALBEDO, STOP IT.